

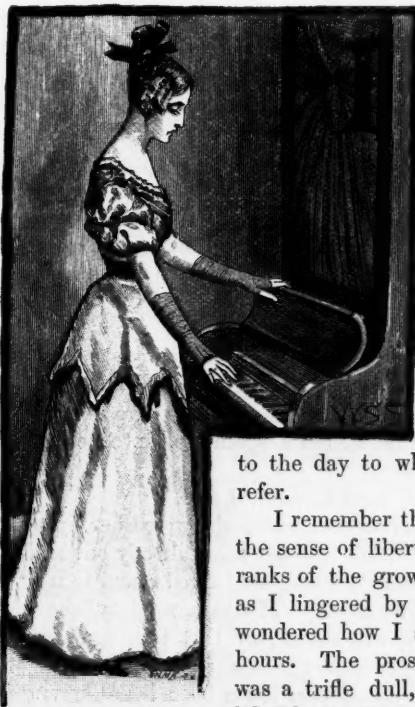
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*THE PIPER OF CAIRNDHU.*

I.



WAS the youngest of my father's children; he was in India; my sisters were married, and my four brothers were with their regiments or at college. My home was with my grandfather at Cairndhu. I had been liberated from school, a 'finished' young lady, only a few days before, and had just got back to the old house on the evening previous

to the day to which these recollections refer.

I remember that day very clearly, and the sense of liberty and promotion to the ranks of the grown-up which it brought, as I lingered by the breakfast-table and wondered how I should get through the hours. The prospect, though dignified, was a trifle dull, after the busy school life I had quitted, and the band of merry

girls I had been living among; for I was alone. My grandfather,

old and infirm, would not leave his room before the afternoon, and my Aunt Elspeth spent her mornings with my grandmother, who was more feeble than her spouse, and seldom ventured downstairs till the candles were lighted. In pure idleness I wandered into the drawing-room and sat down to strum on the piano. How long I sat I do not know, but I was startled by my Aunt Elspeth suddenly breaking in on me.

‘Barbara!’ she said, ‘what are you playing?’ and there was a tone of awed remonstrance in her voice and a scared look in her eye which frightened me, and made my heart stand still, so that I only stared for answer and said nothing.

‘Where heard you that tune, Barbara? And what has possessed you to play it in this house? Speak, lassie! Speak!’ she went on, growing impatient at my silence, for the strangeness of her manner confused me, and I could say nothing. I do not know but she laid her hand on my shoulder in her vehemence; she may even have shaken me, though not roughly—Aunt Elspeth was far too kind for that. At length I answered that the tune was new to me, I had heard it through the open window. Someone coming up the glen, I supposed, had been playing it. It had sounded as if coming up from the old churchyard at the end of the beech avenue, and then it seemed just to die away, as I listened more intently to catch the air. I had been trying to recall it on the piano ever since, and I thought I had nearly got it. ‘It was so wild and so eerie,’ I remember I said, ‘that it was delightful to listen to.’

‘Wild and eerie, I wot,’ Aunt Elspeth answered; ‘but it’s little delight that tune brings to Cairndhu. It’s Hamish Mac-Tavish’s lament, and there’ll be grief ere long, so sure as his pipes are heard in this house!’ and Aunt Elspeth sank into a chair and covered her face.

‘I do not understand, Aunt Elspeth,’ I said.

‘Best so!’ was all her answer, while she wiped her eyes and rose to leave the room. She had her hand already on the door when she seemed to bethink herself, and turned round to me.

‘I am sorry to have disturbed you, Barbara, my dear,’ she said; ‘but if you are wise you will never play that tune again within these walls; or, better, never play it at all! It’s no canny! and I may tell you that, so sure as ever it has been heard here, grief has come to the hearers!’ She went out, closing the door behind her, and leaving me all alone in the big gaunt room, with only

the memory of that dreadful tune, now grown terrible, humming in my ears.

I got through the rest of that day somehow, but certainly without the help of music; indeed, the mere sight of the piano made me shiver for weeks after. I suppose I went out on the braes which overhang Cairndhu, and scrambled upward to the moors above, where the winds coming and going over the heather and the lightsome sunshine bring back the courage, and so recovered command of myself.

In the evening my grandfather did not join us at dinner. My grandmother was in her place at the head of the table, Aunt Elspeth sat opposite her, and I was between. I could see that my aunt had no heart for eating, and looked depressed, owing no doubt to that dreadful tune; but she seemed to have kept her misgivings to herself, for my grandmother was unusually cheerful. She asked about my walk, I remember, and how many grouse I had seen, and discussed with interest the prospects for the coming 'twelfth,' when two at least of my brothers would arrive for a week's shooting.

The dinner was more than half over when I saw Aunt Elspeth start and grow pale, clutching the arms of her chair to steady herself, and looking anxiously at her mother. My grandmother did not observe her. She was busy with her dinner, and chatting pleasantly to me.

At that moment a servant opened the door, bringing in a dish; and on the gust of air which followed him, making the candle flames wave and tremble, was borne a low and wailing sound. If it had not been for my experience of the morning I might not have remarked it, for Cairndhu is a drafty old house, and the wind has an eerie way of sighing through the winding passages; but now there was no mistaking, it was the same wild strain of dismal melody which had stolen in through the open windows in the morning. The door, of course, was closed immediately, but the penetrating sound of the pipes, having once made its entry, was not to be stifled or shut out again.

Cairndhu is a peculiarly planned old place. It is built on a mount or rising ground in the middle of its glen, whose braes rise far above it on either hand. The land rises steadily from the mouth of the glen to the old graveyard round the ruined kirk, which has not been used since the days of Queen Mary; and there the hill begins on which the house is built. The ascent is pretty

steep to where you come to the front door, and the ground continues to rise as the house runs back, and so it comes that the family rooms are on the second story, and there is a wide stone staircase leading up from the entrance hall.

It sounded as if the piper were climbing the hill, and as he rounded each successive curve of the winding approach with its deadening screen of trees and foliage, the music would arrive in a gust of added volume, till by-and-by one would have said



that the player was marching up and down the gravelled space before the house.

It was then that my grandmother, with a startled listening look, laid down her knife and fork; her jaw dropped, and the dear old face grew to an ashen grey. She lay back in her chair, and but for the arms would have fallen, so helpless she seemed, and shocked.

The servants went on with the routine of the dinner without showing a sign of discomposure. They were trained, of course, to show no sign of interest in the conversation and demeanour of the guests, but I could see that they did not hear the weird music which was thrilling our nerves almost beyond endurance.



The butler seemed to divine that something was amiss with his mistress, and came to her side as if to offer assistance, looking, at the same time, towards my aunt; but she merely raised her hand to forbid his interference, and he fell back to his place by the sideboard. The other went on with his service, presenting his dishes and quite undisturbed, unaware, seemingly, of our perturbation, while it was all that we could do to keep still and passive till the tedious observance was concluded.

At length it was over; the wine was set on the table, and the servants withdrew. Ere the door could close behind them, however, the sound had augmented fourfold; and after the shutting, its piercing shrillness continued unimpaired. The mysterious player seemed to have entered the house and to be pacing the hall below, while the shrieking dissonances were flying upward by the staircase as through a trumpet's throat, and hurled along the reverberating corridors in gruesome and ever louder din.

My grandmother appeared about to faint, and Aunt Elspeth rose and tottered to her side, though herself nearly as much in need of support. For me, I was simply dazed, and sat gazing blindly before me as though my eyes could pierce the wainscot; and my heart throbbed so wildly I could scarcely breathe, thinking of the presence drawing near. For now the music sounded as though mounting the stairs, and a power seemed drawing me to him, though I struggled and shrank with what will I could arouse, as one might shrink from the grisly view of Death himself.

The din increased, and a foot slow and heavy was audible through it all, mounting the staircase step by step. At length it reached the landing, and only then did the full, unspeakable horror fill my ears. The footstep stopped outside the door, and the jarring tumult sent a tremor through the walls and furniture of the room.

The glasses quivered on the table, and the candle-flames waved and fluttered in the air's tremulous vibrations. It seemed as if the door must needs fly wide, and the presence be manifest before my eyes.

I think my heart must have stood still. Though I did not fall, I must have grown unconscious, for, save an overpowering horror, I remember nothing more. When the feeling wore off I was kneeling with my arms on the table, and my face supported on my hands. The pipes were still playing, but the sound was receding. The steps seemed to be ascending another flight of stairs, and by-and-by another, growing fainter and slower always,

with the cadences more prolonged, and wailing with a more plaintive grief. Then it seemed as if the player had gone out upon the leads, and was pouring out his lament anew, thinned now and purified as it spread itself in the void of night. The poignant misery of the strain grew mellowed into a mournful sadness, and then it seemed to mount upon the passing wind and slowly drift away, leaving our sorely-racked senses exhausted, yet scarce able to endure the oppressive silence.

We remained all three as we had been for some time, without either speaking or moving. My grandmother was the first to come to herself. She drew a deep sigh and sat up in her chair. Then she began to tremble violently, and fell forward on the table in a tumult of weeping. Aunt Elspeth and I were at her side, but what could we do to soothe her? We could but wait till the paroxysm had spent itself, as by-and-by it did, and her trouble found vent in words. 'My precious husband!' was what she sobbed out, 'must—must we then part? After all these years of trust and happiness? Come, Elspeth! Come! I must go to your father!' And so we supported her, one on either hand, for she could not walk alone after the excitement we had gone through; and we made what haste we could to my grandfather's room.

How soothing and tranquil the scene was there after the terrifying disturbance we had undergone! My grandmother's maid sat in the anteroom, sewing peacefully by the candle, while through the open door of the chamber within appeared my grandfather in his dressing-gown, with his easy chair drawn close to the fire. He seemed to be asleep, for his eyes were closed, and the book he had been reading lay on the carpet by his footstool. The light of the reading lamp fell on his long white hair, and shone among the threads as though they had been silver. He opened his eyes as we entered, and seemed surprised at the intensity with which my grandmother embraced him. He had been drowsing, he said, most of the evening, and was glad of our coming to rouse him up. Nothing unusual, seemingly, had occurred with him, and when I began to ask him if he had not been disturbed, my aunt shot me a glance which closed my lips.

The second morning after, my dear grandfather was found dead in his bed. He had passed into the other life without awaking, and as easily, it would seem, as we enter the land of dreams; so sweet a serenity rested on his features, and the coverings of his couch were so undisturbed.

## II.

My grandmother did not long survive her husband. From the day of his death life ceased to interest her, and her only satisfaction was to mark the progress of her own decay. In a week or two she had ceased to leave her room, a little longer and she did not leave her bed, and it was not many weeks after that the feeble life flickered out altogether, like the flame of a lamp when there is no more oil. Within three months she was laid beside her husband.

My father inherited the property, and Aunt Elspeth wrote urging him to come home at once, leave the service, and assume his place in the county; for a laird had always lived at Cairndhu, and she did not feel competent to advise with Mr. Pittendreigh, the man of business, about leases and other affairs. In answer he told us there was little prospect of his early return. He had received orders to join Lord Gough, and it was generally expected they would have warm work. The months slid by, relieved only by an occasional letter, and that with never a hint of my father's home-coming. We grew reconciled in time, and strove to do our best for the property in its owner's absence.

One day—it was a Sunday—I recollect our going to church. The drive is stamped on my memory as though it were yesterday, and I can see again the breezy dappled sky, and feel the soft air about my face, as we lay back in the barouche and swept down the hill. The light paled as we proceeded—my own life seemed to grow dim. It may have been merely the shadow of the beeches overhead, or a cloud may have drifted over the sun, but my heart grew heavy like lead, though there seemed no reason for it. We passed the gates, leaving the trees behind, but the gloom only deepened, and the high overhanging wall of the old graveyard seemed to block the very stirrings of the air. The crumbling stones were blotched with the gray and yellow scurf of years, and bearded with wall rue; and there hung an earthy savour all around, and a stillness such as brooded over the shaggy hillocks within the enclosure, where we caught a glimpse of them through gaps and rents in the wall. There was nothing really the matter, but yet I felt oppressed and terrified in some nameless way. I would have fain cried out, though I knew not what for; but the breath had thickened in my throat, and I gasped in silence.

The lightsome wind got at us again when the churchyard enclosure was past, and the nightmare feelings were dissipated like fog before a rising breeze. I felt rather ashamed of myself, and pleased that my companion had not noticed my fantastic qualms.

At church the earlier portion of the service passed off as usual. The congregation had sung twice. The minister had prayed, read a chapter of Scripture and given out his text, when I was startled by sounds of commotion in the porch and vestibule—a blare of bagpipes, loud, shrill, discordant, echoing and multiplying and repeating itself in the confined space, till the building seemed to rock and shiver in the tempest of sound.

Aunt Elspeth started and grew sickly pale, braced herself back in the corner of the pew, and covered her face with her hands.

The din resolved itself into the old horrible tune. The lobby door swung open without hands, and the clangour surged into the church, a hurrying flood of sound.

I grew sick and powerless. My breath stopped I think, and I lost the faculty of sight.

The rush of wild discordant lamentation filled the church, and a heavy step could be heard marching with it slowly up the aisle. It passed our pew so close that I felt the sough of the wind on my face as it went by, and I thought I should die; for it was damp and clammy of the churchyard and the mouldering graves. Then it went round the pulpit and down the other aisle.

Anything more piercingly earsplitting I never heard, and the heart-crushing agony of grief it conveyed was beyond description. It went three times round the church, growing slower and less loud each time, exhausted as it seemed with its burden of anguish, and then vanished through the vestry door. I thought I saw the shadowy flutter of a plaid for an instant at that door, but my sight was only coming back to me, as the apparition—shall I call it?—or the sound vanished.

A hearty cry came to my relief when all was over, bringing back composure and enabling me to avoid a scene in church; and I could see my aunt also was shedding tears.

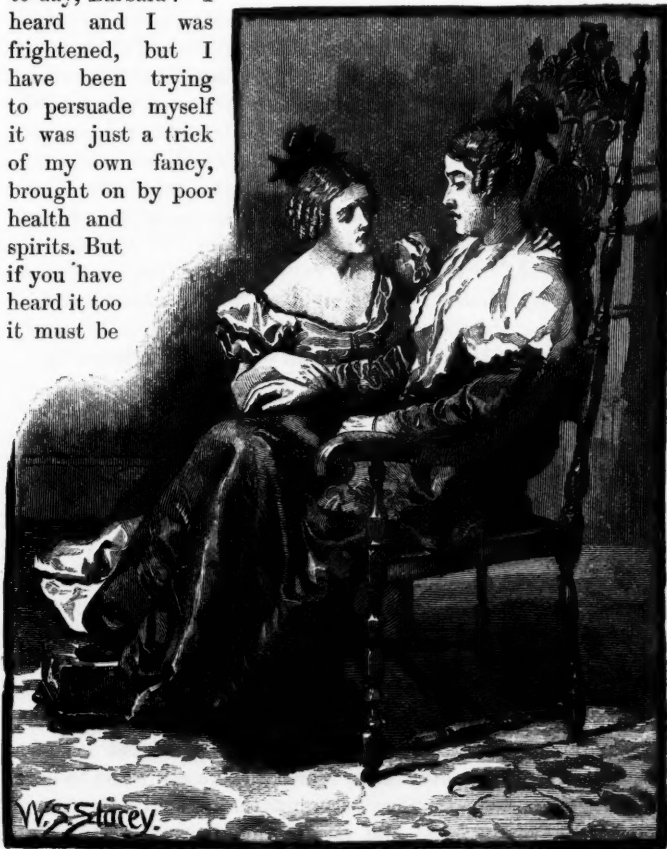
When I became aware again of what was passing around me, it seemed strange to note that the minister was proceeding tranquilly with his sermon, and the congregation, quite undisturbed, sat listening as usual. The disturbance had only affected ourselves, and this, I think, made it more terrible and uncanny.

As may be supposed, we avoided meeting our friends that day

after service, and got home as quietly as possible. I did not venture to speak till having safely passed the old burying-ground we were again within our own policies. Then I ventured to break silence.

‘Did you hear it, auntie?’ I asked.

‘Ah, my poor child!’ she answered, ‘you are an orphan to-day, Barbara! I heard and I was frightened, but I have been trying to persuade myself it was just a trick of my own fancy, brought on by poor health and spirits. But if you have heard it too it must be



true. Hamish MacTavish never plays but for the laird. Your father is dead, Barbara dearest, and the next mail from India will bring the news. My poor brother, and my poor fatherless girl!’

It was a great shock to me to be told this, and my aunt was

deeply distressed at the loss of her brother. It never occurred to us to doubt the warning, yet we could not put the household into black and announce our bereavement (what would people have said if we had?); yet under its shadow we could not live as before. To ourselves that would have appeared indecent; we could only deny ourselves to our friends and live alone.

It was under the pressure of this enforced seclusion that I at last found courage to question Aunt Elspeth about the piper. I shrank from thinking of this unearthly retainer of the family myself, and she had shown unwillingness to mention him; but thrown on each other as we now were for companionship, overshadowed by anticipation of bereavement which we could not divulge, and oppressed by the idea of whence came our knowledge, I grew nervous, and, like all timid things driven to bay, desired to confront the terrors I could not evade. Aunt Elspeth consented at last to enlighten my curiosity, admitting that after twice being frightened I had a right to know, and that it was but justice to our 'forbears' to tell all, they having done no wrong, and I must not be left to suspect them of evil. The following is what she told me.

One of our ancestors, it appears, was 'out in the Forty-five,' to use the old-fashioned phrase. He followed Prince Charlie in his triumphant march through England, and escaped with his body servant from the final overthrow on Culloden Moor, stealing back by circuitous ways to the neighbourhood of Cairndhu, and remaining there in hiding for some time.

There was a ruinous shieling at the head of the glen, some distance above the house, in a lonely spot surrounded with bog, and hidden even from the straggling cattle-tracks across the hills. In this the laird concealed himself.

He would send Hamish down to the house an hour or two before the break of day, when his wife would be waiting to let down a basket of necessaries so soon as she heard the cry of a muircock beneath her casement. The laird himself is said to have been in the house more than once, but that is doubtful. There was a price upon his head, and care was necessary lest some one should suspect and give information in hopes of gaining the reward.

Before long suspicion did arise that the laird was not far off. The lady may have looked less miserable than her neighbours thought she should have looked under the circumstances, or the prattle of one of the children may have divulged something of

what their mother strove so strenuously to conceal. A sergeant and his men were quartered on the household, and there they remained for many days without discovering anything.

At length the sergeant's ear was caught by the cry of a muir-cock heard close to the house, in the dead of the night, and night after night, though neither sight nor sound of the bird could be discovered at other times. A watch was set. Hamish was surprised in the act of receiving his supplies. The sentry challenged, and on his making no answer, ran forward and collared him. In the struggle which followed the soldier's musket went off, and the sergeant and his men lurking expectant were speedily on the scene. Hamish contrived to slip from his captor's grasp, and just as the others arrived jumped into the bushes and ran home at the top of his speed.

Had it been a dark night, that would have been the end of the adventure ; but unfortunately the moon was in its third quarter, the sky clear, and objects in the open discernible as clearly as by day.

The soldiers gave chase, cracking branches guided them in which direction to run, and after they had crossed the belt of wood about the house, they could descry the fugitive plainly enough as he ran before them. They did not fire, but merely followed, counting on his bringing them to a nest of rebels, where they would be able to make several captures at once.

Hamish reached the shieling only in time to warn his master and bid him escape by the back when the soldiers arrived in front. He closed and attempted to hold the door against them that his master might gain a few strides in advance. It was all he could do.

The soldiers pushed, and, finding resistance, fired a volley through the door, and Hamish fell shot through the body. The men rushed in and passed through. Poor Hamish dragged himself after them, and reached the open air in time to see his master fired at, wounded, overtaken, and bound. Then he fainted.

The laird was carried to his house prisoner, and very speedily they mounted him on horseback regardless of his wound, and bore him south to his fate—the gallows. He was able, however, to confide the lifeless body, as he believed it, of his faithful servant to his lady's care, and so soon as the soldiers were gone she had it brought down to Cairndhu. Hamish proved to be still alive, though badly wounded, and it was a solace to the poor lady, too sure of what her husband's fate would be, to nurse his devoted follower.



Hamish's wound healed quickly, but yet the man would not get well. He seemed unwilling to recover, and as if he thought himself unworthy to live. There was a weight on his mind which would not lighten, a fury in his soul which took delight, as it were, to heap remorse upon himself.

'Ach, Hamish!' they would hear him muttering to himself, 'let fire unquenchable burn Hamish. She wad lead the rid-coats to ta laird's houf, whan she sud haff rin to ta hill! Burn red fires 'at neffer goes out, an' burn Hamish 'at wass not wise enuff to lead ta sogers away from ta master!'

They gave Hamish his pipes—he had been the laird's piper before the rebellion, but became body servant when he went to join the Prince—when he grew strong enough to blow them, and great comfort he appeared to find in them, though the skirling din over all the house brought little comfort to the other inmates. It was not his old tunes which he played—the gatherings and battle songs which had used to be played before the lairds when they went out to fight. He 'just sat and crooned,' as Aunt Elspeth expressed it, over his pipes, with stifled whistlings and hummings, and now and then an eldricht screech which brought the hearts of the household into their very throats.

It was not till weeks after the laird's capture, and his death had taken place in the meantime, that these musical broodings matured themselves into a form of sound. By special grace, and after much interest had been exerted, the poor remains which could no longer feel the tyrant's vengeance were given up to the family; and the mournful company of his children, which fetched them, was approaching the house, when down from the loft where he had lain strode Hamish MacTavish, shouldering his pipes, and met his dead master at the front door with a lament so agonisingly shrill and mournful as ear had never listened to before. He spoke not to anyone, but stalked on in front, raising with his pipes a sorrowful outcry which drowned every other sound. Up the stairs he went, and along the passages till he reached the chamber where the dead man was to lie that night, and there by the threshold he dropped on his knees, and the wailing of his pipes sank in what seemed an agony of deprecating entreaty to the dead. It was observed that as the corpse was borne past him he was seized with a tremor which choked him, and rendered his melody nearly inarticulate; and when once the bearers with their burden had entered the chamber and the door

was closed, there broke forth a tempest of tumultuous agony which resounded through the old house from turret to cellar, and made the heart of every hearer stand still with awe.

It was in vain that the widow and her household bade him go take rest and be still; he vowed never to take rest again, and seemed to be but half in the world around him, hearing and understanding little save what accorded with his frantic grief. All through that afternoon and night he blew and blew on his pipes the same distracting lamentation, and when at length the mouth-piece slipped from between the exhausted lips, and the weary elbow forgot to press the bag, the half-unconscious figure continued to kneel in the same distraught and conscience-stricken posture; the lips would move and mutterings be overheard, asking why he had not taken to the hill rather than bring the red-coats on the laird's retreat, cursing and bidding himself go hang, like that other who betrayed his Master.

When the laird was buried Hamish insisted on leading the procession, and would not be brought away with the rest when the rite was ended. All through that night—and it was stormy with wind and sleet—the scream of his pipes could be heard on the passing gusts; in the morning Hamish lay dead across the grave, and they buried him, still clasping his pipes in a dead man's grip, at the feet of his master.

Since then, whenever the Laird of Cairndhu is about to die, Hamish comes back and plays his lament, heard only by the members of the family, and by them wherever they may be.

In time came news that my father had fallen in the battle of Sobraon, fighting the Sikhs.

### III.

My brother Hector was not very old when he succeeded my father, nor very wise, perhaps; but an old woman may be forgiven for saying that he was without question the handsomest man I ever saw. He was twenty-four, and excusably unwilling to quit the army and settle down to a humdrum country life. At this time the regiment was ordered to South Africa, which was hard on the young man just come into his property; but there was no help for it. To Africa he must needs go, and Africa proved his ruin.

They were sent far up the country, to keep the native tribes in check. It was a lonely station, without society or any amuse-

ment except shooting ; and after he had bagged his hippopotamus or two, and his brace of lions, and sent us a bundle of wild beast skins to ornament the library at Cairndhu, he grew tired of it and longed for society ; and what he had been used to all his life—female society.

There was only one lady at the station, the major's wife ; not a very nice person, I fear, though I never saw her. It was said that her husband had carried her to Africa with him because he could not trust her at home in his absence ; but then he was old and cross, and had what people call a difficult temper.

If Hector found life dull in Caffir-land it could not have been cheerful for a lady there ; and I fancy the two fell into a way of mitigating their boredom by sharing it.

The major's wife must have been ten years older than Hector, so I will not believe that there was any truth in the scandalous stories which soon began to circulate. The stories did circulate, however, and the husband, who appears to have been both a fool and a savage, began to act as gentlemen never do to their wives. The lady declared she would not remain with him, and my poor Quixotic brother, feeling bound to stand by the woman whose name had got mixed up with his own—in the talk of some idle fools—eloped with her. He had to leave the service after that ; though, owing to the family interest, he was allowed to sell out instead of being dismissed ; but his prospects for life were blighted. He was bound to this woman who had disgraced herself by a tie more binding to a high-spirited gentleman than marriage itself. He could not bring her home to Cairndhu, and he could not live with her anywhere in Great Britain without constant danger of meeting persons who knew their story, and could not avoid making the situation unpleasant, so they went to Canada, which forty years ago was a good hiding-place from Mrs. Grundy. There used to be little known about that colony in the mother country, as, owing either to the fierceness of the climate or the slowness with which fortunes were made, it was a good deal like the grave: nobody returned to disclose its secrets, though inquiring friends were always told that the emigrants were happy.

We heard little of or from Hector, except when he acknowledged receipt of his rents. He resided in different parts of the country ; made trial both of farming and town life, and finally interested himself in mining operations. But, in truth, my re-

collections of those years are engrossed by affairs of a more personal nature, relating to my marriage.

Hector by-and-by began to write for money. Stock in the funds and other investments were sold, and the proceeds remitted. Then came orders to send more, even if Cairndhu had to be mortgaged. That was done; the property was his own, and he had a right to make his own use of it, though we might and did remonstrate while complying, and wondered why he did not write to acknowledge the money, which nevertheless was received, as we learned by-and-by from the banker through whom the remittance was made.

His silence became intelligible when one evening in the gloaming, as Aunt Elspeth and I were sitting together, we heard Hamish's pipes again. We knew then that Hector was dead or dying, and we did not look for any other intimation, for of course we did not expect a letter from *her*.

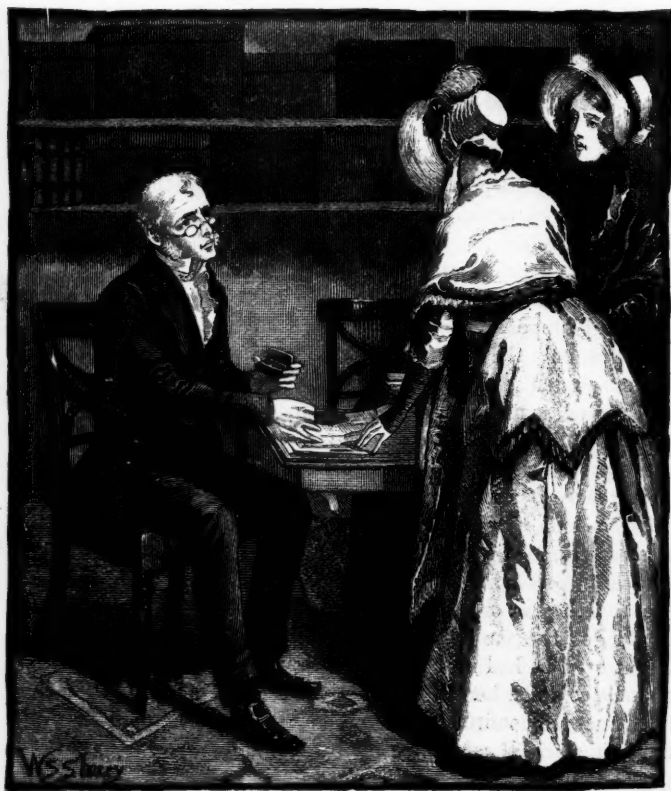
It was strange how calmly we received the warning; but custom, I suppose, can familiarise with anything. We cried, it is true, but only the tears which were natural as we thought over his misguided life, and we waited for such particulars as his solicitor or some one would be sure to send. We wrote to my brother Colin, the next heir, asking his instructions, and made every preparation for transferring the property to the new proprietor except announcing the demise of his predecessor. We could not do that on the mere authority of a message from the other world, Mr. Pittendreigh said; and he had a good deal of trouble in persuading my aunt not to hang up the hatchment over the church pew, or put the servants into mourning. He said it would get the family a bad name for uncanny dealings, and we might even be had up before the Presbytery. That alarmed her, and she confined herself to telling people that there was a rumour, but it needed confirmation. She insisted, however, on going into mourning herself as a compromise.

The news we looked for never came, and twelve months after his last letter we had another from Hector himself. It was expressed in language wonderfully similar to the other, and quite as peremptory about money to be remitted forthwith even if Cairndhu should be mortgaged; but this time the sum required was not two thousand pounds but ten thousand.

Aunt Elspeth would not believe the testimony of her eyes. 'It could not be,' she said, 'considering what we knew;' and, for

myself, I confess the idea of forgery did cross my mind, though when I scrutinised the handwriting and signature, it seemed impossible to doubt they were Hector's own.

When the letter was shown to Mr. Pittendreigh, he said it was strange, and brought out the letter of the year before to compare.



Singularly enough, the dates agreed. Both were October 22, but there was a blottiness in the last figure of the year in the new one. It was 1848 quite clear in the older letter, and 1849 with a woolliness of the 9 in the other. There was something similar about the 'ten' preceding 'thousand pounds' in the new letter—a want of edge and crampedness in the writing. Mr.

Pittendreigh pointed out these two peculiarities to me as he took snuff, and coughed his little cough, but said nothing. 'We must set inquiries on foot in Canada,' he said after a pause, 'and meanwhile you might write him a sisterly letter of surprise at his long silence. But do not commit yourself,' he added, 'and convey no information of any kind till we can resolve our doubts.'

My letter called forth no reply, and at length it was resolved that some one must go to Canada and sift the mystery to the bottom.

John Pittendreigh—he was Mr. Pittendreigh's son—and I had long made up our minds that we were to marry, but the suspense we were in as to Hector's fate had led to delays. When summer came round once more we resolved to go on with the wedding, and travel together to America in search of the missing brother. We sailed to Halifax, and thence travelled by stages and steamboats to Montreal and Upper Canada. It was a long and confusing journey, but at last we found ourselves at Rimmerville, where Hector's mines were said to be. No Hector was there. The postmaster told us that he and his wife had left the place about a year before, and their letters when any came were forwarded to Slabtown, some fifty miles further west. The mining speculation, it appeared, had turned out badly, Hector had lost his money and his health, and had given the thing up in disgust. We were shown the scene of his misfortunes—a deep hole in a hill-side half filled with water, heaps of rubbish, and a few dismantled shanties.

We went to Slabtown and again inquired of the postmaster. He said there was no one of the name in the village, but letters had come so addressed, and they were claimed by a Mr. Welsher, a speculator lately married, who lived hard by. John went to call on Mr. Welsher, but for myself I felt a strange oppression and heaviness on my senses and returned to our inn.

I must have fallen asleep in my chair, I suppose, and dreamed; but, if so, the parlour I sat in formed the scene and background of my dream. I remember plainly I saw the room-door open, and in walked Hector in his regimentals, looking just as he did the last time we saw him, years before, at Cairndhu, on his coming into the property. I tried to spring forward and clasp him, but I was powerless and could not move. I tried to cry out, but my voice was gone.

He stood looking at me with a great sadness in his eyes, and his lips moved, but there came no sound. As I looked, the youth and brightness seemed to fade out of him, and leave him haggard

and forlorn. He grew less substantial, too, and farther away, and as I watched him his life seemed to die out altogether. He grew ghastly, like a corpse, shadowy and unreal, and still farther and farther away, as though borne backwards and out into space. I felt a blowing on my temples bringing with it distant sounds—the notes of Hamish's pipes—and as Hector drifted outwards there came a misty presence in between, with a waving of plaids, and the upper outline of a bonnet, and the tops of the pipes with their streamers discernible above the vagueness of glimmering shadow. It seemed to turn to me, though I could see no face, and it beckoned me with a shadowy hand to follow.

John aroused me by laying his hand on my shoulder, and repeating my name a second time. He had come in from seeing Welsher, and was beginning to tell me of the interview, but I stopped him. I could still hear Hamish's pipes, and was resolved to follow in obedience to the beckoning hand I had seen in my dream. With John by my side I felt no fear.

We followed, or rather I followed, the retreating sound of the pipes—John heard nothing—and by-and-by we came to a quiet little graveyard, cut out of the bush. We entered it, the invisible piper marching before. I could hear the stamps of his foot; and he led us along the path till he came to a burial lot not long occupied. The paint on the picket fence was fresh, and the sod was trim and green, but there was no headstone to tell who rested beneath.

Here it seemed as if the piper took his stand, to play over his lament anew from beginning to end; then with a sudden transition he burst into that venerable song of rejoicing which we were accustomed to use in singing the peculiar metre of the Hundred and Thirty-sixth Psalm at Cairndhu; and then the music seemed to rise in the air as a lark might, and to lose itself in the blessed sunshine.

We were not long in seeking out the minister to whose flock the cemetery belonged. He brought his register and showed the entry of the burial. It was dated some twenty months before, just a month after his earlier letter had reached us, and there could be no doubt about the identity—Captain Hector Dunmain, formerly of Her Majesty's —th Regiment.

'And that man Welsher,' John exclaimed, 'told me not an hour ago that Hector and his wife had removed to Toronto about a year since, and were now somewhere in the States!'

'Surely not, sir,' said the minister; 'you must have mis-



understood. The gentleman was in poor health when he came here, and he died a week or two after. His wife was in great distress, and without a friend in this country excepting Mr. Welsher. He was a bachelor and eager to take care of her, but she felt that she could not with propriety remain in his house. My wife brought her to live with us—a most admirable Christian lady, sir, we found her—and a few weeks later I married her to Mr. Welsher—an exemplary couple, sir.’

John visited the ‘couple,’ armed with this knowledge, and was able to wring from them a confession of what they had done. In the near prospect of Hector’s death it would appear that the lady and the business partner strove to get all the money out of him which was possible on any pretext, and then prevailed on him to leave Rimmerville that his family might lose sight of him. He had been so ill when he last wrote for money, that on the letter falling out of sight his wife had persuaded him to write another, rather than wait till it could be found. After his death the first was recovered, and the love of money had been stronger than Mr. Welsher’s principles—if he had any. It appeared to him that use might be made of the recovered document, ‘and after all,’ as he said by way of apology, ‘the money was for Hector’s widow.’ To avoid the second letter being too much a repetition of the first, he had tried a little chemistry in the two places which had aroused Mr. Pittendreigh’s suspicions. Now that he was in our power he confessed, but he hoped that, as the money had not been paid, we would be merciful and not bring disgrace on the woman for whom Hector had sacrificed so much.

Naturally we had no wish to punish either the man or the woman, our sole desire being to solve the mystery of my brother’s fate.

It would appear that Hamish MacTavish’s uneasy spirit found rest on the day he guided us to Hector’s grave. I presume he must have felt that, in saving the family from that fraudulent demand for 10,000*l.*, he had atoned for the unintentional injury he did our ancestor.

It is certain, at least, that there were no *manifestations* on the death of my brother Colin, the next laird, and we therefore trust that when the time shall come for his son, the present owner, to be laid with his fathers, the family will be spared a renewal of those unearthly sympathisings which formerly were wont to disturb them.

## SOME LITERARY RECOLLECTIONS.

## IV.

As it has been represented to me by many persons, that in these recollections of mine I have plunged too much *in medias res*, and given no account of my early predilection for story-telling and literary life, I accordingly accede to their request. For my part, however, I confess that, in perusing the early chapters of biographies, I have generally had a tendency to 'skip'; the life of 'literary' boys being very much like that of other boys, with the disadvantage of being generally a miserable one. Boys with a turn for humour (unless of the practical joke description) fare worst of all, for your average boy hates wit even more than other kinds of intelligence, and licks its possessor with a wicket, for being 'facetious.'

It was my unhappy lot in youth to have a lively fancy, and to be much addicted to reading works of the imagination; and though I hated lessons of all kinds as much as any of my contemporaries, they never forgave me this, and it made me a very unpopular boy. It was hard upon me, for I suppose in some sort I inherited these disadvantages. My father was of a genial nature, very well read, and with a turn for practical matters also which I never possessed. He had led a life of pleasure for many years, but when it became necessary for him to exert himself for the sake of his family, he buckled to his work with amazing diligence and success. The necessity I believe arose from something like disinheritance. In the Town Hall at Maidenhead there hangs a picture of my paternal grandfather, in a stiff wig, and with a very disinheriting countenance. He was, at all events, very rich, and left his only son very far from rich. At his death my father bestirred himself, and by help of troops of friends (for he was very popular) obtained certain appointments; among them the clerkship to the Thames Commissioners, at that time an important post with large emoluments attached to it. He could not, however, have been entirely absorbed in business, for at the same time he kept the Berkshire Harriers. I was so young when I lost him that I have scarcely any remembrance of my father; but he must have been an attractive man.

Miss Mitford writes to me of him : 'Your father and I were friends when I was a girl of fifteen, and he a lad of your own age. I doubt if you know the manner of man he was, for the cares of the world had changed him much. In his brilliant youth he was much like a hero of the fine old English comedy (which you would do well to read); the Archers and Mirabels of Farquhar and Congreve; not a poet, but a true lover of poetry, with a faculty of reciting verse which is amongst the most graceful of all accomplishments.' Almost my only recollection of my father is our reading 'Macbeth' together; it always fell to my part to rehearse the dagger scene with a paper-knife. This I greatly enjoyed, but not so another amusement which he expected me to appreciate.

Twice a week I had to go hunting; this I abhorred. I had a nice little bay pony (*Flash of Memory*, 'Lightfoot'), and could ride well enough, but the proceedings were too protracted for my taste, and I wanted to be at home to finish the 'Mysteries of Udolpho' by the fire. There was one thing I disliked even more than hare-hunting. This was fox-hunting. All my family, except myself, had sporting proclivities, and many a time through mistaken friendship have I been given 'a mount' with 'The Craven,' or 'The South Berks,' which I would much rather have declined, had I dared to do so. It was not only my own reputation, however, that was at stake, and I had to go through with it. I remember on one occasion getting some very bad language from a huntsman for feeding some young hounds with cake in a wood. Sometimes the cold, and the waiting about, and the having nothing to read, grew absolutely intolerable; there was then nothing for it but to dismount, put clover or something in my hair, smear my shoulder with mould, and ride home 'having met with rather a nasty tumble.' Of course it was very wrong; but why will people compel poor boys to amuse themselves with things that give them no pleasure? It would have been better (and cheaper) to have let me enjoy 'Peregrine Pickle,' 'Captain Cook's Voyages,' and the 'Arabian Nights,' all day, without the temptation of practising duplicity. My dearest mother—kindest of women, and at that time one of the most beautiful—was the only human being who understood me. I was a home bird in every feather, and her pet.

Never shall I forget the misery I endured at my first school from home-sickness; fox-hunting was nothing to it. When I used to wake in the mornings, and find myself after happy dreams in

that land of exile, I thought myself the most miserable of human creatures. I have the keenest recollection of it even now. Nothing that I ever suffered since—and I have suffered like other men, in many ways—has been comparable with the misery of that time. I am well aware, of course, that I was not a fair specimen of the British schoolboy; but when I hear what he calls ‘old buffers’ talk of the delights of school, and wish themselves back there, I think of the Cretans to whom the Apostle has given the palm for Lying. The author of ‘Vice Versâ’ has of late, with as much truth as wit, exploded the whole delusion, and I thank him for it. I always learnt my lessons, but without the least interest in them. I pitied and liked the ushers. The head-master I did not like; he was a pompous lethargic fellow. I remember on one occasion inquiring of him how Castor and Pollux could have had immortality conferred upon them *alternately*. ‘You young fool,’ he replied, ‘how could they ever have had immortality conferred upon them *at all*?’

I was but seven years old, or so, but I perceived from that moment—for how could he otherwise have missed the whole point of my difficulty?—that it was possible for a man to be at once a scholar and an ass. That view has on more than one occasion been since corroborated. I was only popular at this school for one reason: it was unhappily discovered that I invented stories, and thenceforth—miserable Scheherazadè!—I was compelled to narrate romances out of my own head at nights till the falling asleep of my last lord and master permitted my weary little body and cudgelled brains to seek the same repose. I remained at this establishment, which was preparatory for Eton, for several years. It was so hateful to me (from no fault of its own, I am bound to say; school was antipathetic to me, that was all), that, when the holidays were over, I used to bury things, which would otherwise have been useful to me, in the garden, so that I might dig them up, when I returned home, undefiled from any experience of that classical seminary.

One morning, in the middle of the term, there was a commotion in the house, to us smaller boys unintelligible, except that there was no morning school, which we appreciated as much as the biggest. A strange gentleman appeared at midday, and informed us that the head-master had been summoned abroad on urgent private affairs, and that our parents and guardians had been communicated with; I knew nothing of what it all meant except that

the term had been miraculously and providentially shortened, and that we were to go home. Even when I got to learn that the 'urgent private affairs' meant bankruptcy and flight, I am afraid I evinced a shocking equanimity, and only thought of Lightfoot (for it was not the hunting season) and my mother.

I suppose I was about ten years old when I went to Eton. I was at a dame's house, and my tutor was Cookesley, a very eccentric but capital fellow. I was probably too young to properly appreciate even Eton: the fagging, though not severe, was very offensive to me, and I resented the ridiculous airs and graces of the upper boys. I remember a fifth-form young gentleman (looking in his white tie like a miniature parson) inquiring of me in a drawling voice, 'Lower Boy, what *might* your name be?' Though I never properly understood the niceties of the Greek aorist, I did understand the inflections of my native tongue, and replied, 'Well, it *might* be Beelzebub, but it isn't,' upon which the duodecimo divine altered his tone very much, and even proceeded to blows. It was only the proper punishment for 'cheek,' no doubt, but I thought it hard that a repartee should be so ill-deserved. The fagging system of which Thackeray has expressed such bitter scorn was at its height at that time. Its defenders used to say that it prevented bullying; but, as a matter of fact, where a fifth-form fellow was a brute, it authorised it. One B——, a boy at my dame's, was an especial victim of this tyranny; one of the heads of the house had taken a particular antipathy to him, and was always sending him on long errands for mere cruelty. On one occasion, he sent him to the end of the Long Walk (four miles away) to fetch a brick from the statue of George III. A moralist, or the gentleman in the Society journals who solves the Hard Questions, may decide what B—— ought to have done under such circumstances. What he did do, was to bring a brick from a much less distant spot, and take his affidavit that it came from His Majesty's statue. Whatever virtues the fagging system may have inculcated, it certainly taught the Art of Lying. In spite indeed of the general contempt in which, upon the whole, I think that vice was held at Eton, there were many exceptions. Nobody got 'swished,' for example, if he could evade it by a tarradiddle. It was, and is, a grossly indecent performance, which one illustration in the 'London News,' or 'Graphic,' would assuredly put an end to for ever. Dr. Hawtrey, who was the head-master in my time, detested it. I can see him now in his cassock and bands,

holding the birch (as Lamb says of *his* master) 'like a lily,' in his jewelled fingers, while some young gentleman, in the presence of a troop of friends, was undoing his braces. 'Please, sir, *first fault*,' pleads the trembling boy (everybody was let off the first time, unless for the most heinous offences). 'I think I remember your name before,' says the pedagogue in an awful voice.

'My brother, sir,' suggests the culprit. (It was a happy thing to have had, as I had, a brother before you at Eton.)

'I'll look at my book,' was the stern rejoinder. And in the meantime—for sometimes he had had no brother—the culprit fastened his braces: he was at least reprieved. A humorous lad I will call Vivian, who had reached the rather unfloggable age of seventeen, and was upon the point of entering the army, was swished, as he thought unjustly, the very week before his departure from the school. In those days a perquisite—and a very large perquisite—of the head-master's was a ten-pound note given to him by every fifth-form boy on leaving. The etiquette was to call at the lodge, and drop the note into a jar, or anything handy, where the doctor could find it, after his dear pupil had gone away. It was something like the visit of a delicate-minded patient to a doctor of medicine. But Vivian only pretended to drop his ten-pound note into the jar, and reserved it for more agreeable purposes. He pictured to himself with great satisfaction the head-master's fruitless hunt after that bit of tissue paper, after he had got over the emotion of wishing him farewell. 'I *can't* flog him for flogging me unjustly,' was his reflection, 'but, dash it, I can fine him!' I have narrated this incident, I think, in 'Less Black than We're Painted,' but it is possible that some people (Philistines) may not have read it.

The cruellest thing that happened to me at Eton was a vain attempt to contribute to the school magazine, called the 'Eton Bureau'; as I was only ten years old, however, the disappointment was hardly to be wondered at. When I had been at Eton a year or so, I received a 'nomination' to the Royal Military Academy and was removed to a preparatory school at Woolwich, where I began my education afresh, and remained many years. In the days when I was young the word 'cramming,' as applied to educational seminaries, was unknown, but the thing itself was in existence, though not on so large a scale as at present. When a boy received a nomination for the Military Academy, though the interval, as in my case, before he could be qualified for admission might be a long

one, he was sent at once to one of the many schools at Woolwich, which professed to educate him for that purpose, and for nothing else. Some boys had very little time to spare, and their education (especially if they came from public schools, where little was learnt at that date, save Greek and Latin) was necessarily carried on at high pressure. This saved time, and to put the whole establishment on the same footing saved trouble. I had never known what work was till I went to Woolwich, and I had much rather have remained in ignorance. We had really hardly any playtime, save on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and yet our position was one of ease and leisure compared with that of boys at certain rival establishments. At one of them, where the young gentlemen went especially late—at fifteen, or fifteen and a half (the age of admission to the Academy being sixteen)—they took their lessons with their meals, like dinner pills, and digested Euclid between the courses. It was taken for granted (and I am bound to say in most cases with good reason) that no one who came to Messrs. Hurry and Crammem's had ever learnt anything before; yet no explanation of anything was vouchsafed to us. It was understood that we couldn't swim, yet we were flung out of our depth into the river. I have tried all systems of education, with the poorest results imaginable, but this one was certainly the most hateful. For weeks I used to learn Euclid *by heart*, without a soul to tell me what was the meaning of it, or why I was punished for my performances at the board. Languages have been always as unattainable to me as the science of music, and for many months I used to copy my German exercises from a fellow-student, till a catastrophe happened: I was so ignorant of the German characters—in which they were written—that I actually signed his name at the end of one of them, instead of my own. Detection, of course, would have taken place much earlier had I been nearer my examination, for the elder boys were looked after sharply enough. Heavens, what a life it was! If a boy had died there, his existence would have ended like that of an 'habitual criminal,' in penal servitude; and his friends would doubtless have remarked that he had passed away in happy boyhood, before he had known the ills of life. Indeed, I was often told then that I was 'like a young bear, with all my troubles to come.' It is difficult to decide whether your sanctimonious fool, or your philosophic fool, deserves the palm for folly.

What I especially resented at this place was that, in the whirl and hurry of 'cram,' there was no time for reading and writing;



for I was in my youth an omnivorous reader, and in spite of the many mills of education through which (as will be seen) I passed, contrived to learn some things really worth knowing; it is fair also to say (though I derived little other benefit from these seminaries) that their great variety was very useful to me, in the line of life I subsequently chose for myself, and offered me a wide study of life at an unusually early age. As for writing, I was never tired of setting down 'what I was pleased to call my thoughts,' on paper, and generally in verse; and what is much more strange I found a channel (in the eye of the law at least) of 'publication' for them. A schoolfellow of mine, Raymond, had a talent for drawing, and a third scarcely less gifted genius, Jones, could write like print. These various talents might have remained comparatively unknown, but for one Barker, who had a genuine turn for finance, and who hit upon a plan for combining them. We were like poor and struggling inventors, who in this young gentleman found their capitalist, and thanks to him were enabled to enlighten the world; and the parallel, as will be shown, went even further. His idea was that we should start a weekly paper, full of stories and poems. I was to compose the contents, Jones was to write any number of fair copies, and Raymond was to illustrate them.

'Of course,' said Barker, 'we shall not do it for nothing,' which I thought (even then) a very just observation. The price of each copy was accordingly fixed at sixpence. It did not strike me that anyone would refuse to give so small a sum for such admirable literature (not to mention the pictures, which indeed I did not think so highly of), but in practice we found there were difficulties. Many boys were of so gross a nature that they preferred to borrow their literature, and spend their sixpences in the tuck shop; and though the first number (as often happens) was—to Barker—a financial success, the second number fell flat, and there were several surplus copies on our hands. Then came in our proprietor's genius for finance; he was the treasurer of the school, entrusted with the paying out of a certain weekly pocket-money, of two shillings, which, though despised at the beginning of the term, when our slender purses were full, became before the end of it of considerable importance. He resolved on a *coup d'état*, and calmly deducted sixpence from everybody's two shillings, and gave them our paper instead. It was the first instance with which I became acquainted of 'a forced circulation.' Experiments of a similar kind have been tried by political financiers in many countries, but rarely without

great opposition; 'the masses' never know what is good for them, and our schoolfellows were no exception to the rule; they called our proprietor 'a Jew,' and, so to speak, 'murmured against Moses.' He was tall and strong, and fought at least half-a-dozen pitched battles for the maintenance of his object; I think he persuaded himself, like Charles I., that he was really in the right, and set down their opposition to mere 'impatience of taxation;' but in the end they were 'one too many for him,' and, indeed, much more than one. He fell fighting, no doubt, in the sacred cause of literature, but also for his own sixpences, for we—the workers—never saw one penny of them.

As I grew older, matters grew better with me at Messrs. Hurry and Crammem's establishment, or perhaps the improvement only lay in the fact that I began to see the humorous side of them. I learnt to do my work well, though I never liked it, nor have I ever liked any work except of my own choosing, though to *that*, Heaven knows, I have stuck closely enough. The Bohemian side of my character now began to develop itself, and that so strongly, that, considering the great respectability of my family, I am almost inclined to think (like the Irish hypochondriac) that I must have been changed at nurse. I used to delight in running up to town on short leave (from Saturday to Sunday night), and 'in spite of all temptations' of invitations from my relations, preferred to do so on my own hook. It was more agreeable to me to be my own master than to sit in the lap of comfort. At that time 'a sandwich and a glass of ale'—both, fortunately, of great size—used to be advertised for fourpence, and I have subsisted on that meal, rather than on the stalled ox, and conventionalism therewith. When money has been very tight, I have even slept, I fear, in a day cab, in a mews. At fifteen, in short, I knew more of the queer side of life than most people of fifty, but I became acquainted with it of my own free will, which is a very different thing (and has very different effects) from becoming acquainted with it on compulsion.

I remember going to the Derby, and coming back (from want of funds) a great portion of the journey astride a hearse, clinging not, indeed, to the plumes (for it was disengaged), but to bare poles. Of course it was all very wrong, but I was never mischievous, nor can I recollect ever having taken the initiative in hurting any living creature. On the other hand, if I suffered a gratuitous wrong at the hands of any schoolfellow, and it was not apologised for, I resented it exceedingly; what an innate villain, I reasoned, must

he be to attack so harmless an individual; and I generally contrived not only to be even with the young gentleman in question, but to strike a moderate balance in my own favour.

I have followed this practice throughout life, and though it is not strictly a Christian virtue, I venture to think it tends to the public advantage. If offensive people could be generally made to understand the theory of the turning of worms, they would be more careful of putting their foot down upon those apparently defenceless creatures. In the matter of reprisals, one is apt, of course, to make mistakes; but I think, even at that early age, I could recognise the difference between a light-hearted scamp and a cold-blooded scoundrel. That conciliation with the Base, and especially the Cruel, is useless—is a lesson that I learnt as a small boy, and have never forgotten; I have generally managed—upon principle—to pay them out.

As the time grew near for the entrance examination to Woolwich, Mr. Hurry began, for the first time, to take some interest in me, who had hitherto been left to the ushers. 'Your father' (he had been deceased for about five years) 'has been writing,' he told me, 'very seriously about your Euclid.'

Mr. Hurry knew all the tricks of his trade. He was confident of my passing the ordinary examination, but was very doubtful of my being able to get through the medical branch of it, because I was so very short-sighted. He gave me, however, the best advice. 'They will tell you to look out of the window and describe the colours of the horses on the common. Mind you say "bay," very rapidly, for all horses are either "grey" or "bay."' If not strictly well-principled, Mr. Hurry was very good fun, and I am indebted to him (though I was not aware of it at the time) to much material for my first work, 'The Foster Brothers.'

I thought myself very fortunate (though, as it happened, it eventually came to nothing) when I took the third place at the entrance examination into the Military Academy. The humours of that establishment at that date I shall not attempt to describe; they were fitted for the pen of a Smollett, but scarcely adapted for a modern audience. I have introduced some of them (after a certain necessary refining process) into 'What He Cost Her,' and the recollection of them has been doubtless of advantage to me, from a literary point of view. *Nihil humanum a me alienum puto* is a motto that belongs to the novelist even more than to the poet; and, indeed, life at the Military Academy had very little

to do with poetry. The government of the place was a despotism tempered, not by epigrams, but by escapades. Its subjects were insubordinate, and demanded frequent fusillades—expulsions. Our age, from fifteen to eighteen, was, no doubt, a difficult one to legislate for; we were neither boys nor men, and though subject to military discipline, like soldiers, we were sometimes treated quite as small boys. On one occasion, in order to check extravagance, it was ordained that we should only have five pounds apiece, of pocket-money, on rejoining after a vacation; as one of us notoriously kept a pack of beagles, this was not an edict likely to have, at all events, a universal application.

The authorities feared ridicule quite as much as the cadets themselves did. I remember the governor reading prayers to us in the dining-hall, one wet Sunday. The chapter for the day happened to be the autobiography of St. Paul, in which the words 'I speak as a fool' occur more than once, and those the reader left out, for fear of exclamations of agreement. It was here that 'Lord Bloomfield' and 'The Earl of Moira' (signs of public-houses on Shooter's Hill) were given by N. as respectable references, and it was here (or, at least, while he was a cadet) that he carried out that famous operation in sheep.<sup>1</sup>

My military career was brief; it was cut short, however, not in the usual manner, by expulsion, but by ill health; and at seventeen I was sent to a private tutor's, in preparation for the University.

My school life, as may be gathered, had not been destitute of fun, but upon the whole I detested it. It was now for the first time that I became acquainted with happiness. To me it is curious

<sup>1</sup> A story should never be told twice in print, at all events by the same man, but, in the interest of those who have not read it, I must be excused for repeating this one. N. and M., cadets, tall and hairy, and looking much older than they were, found themselves one vacation with only five shillings between them, and in need of capital. They were accustomed to agricultural pursuits, and N. plumed himself on his judgment of sheep. 'Let us go,' he said, 'to the sheep fair at E., and buy a flock and sell them at a profit.' They attired themselves in proper raiment and went to the fair; after a general inspection of the pens, they bought a hundred sheep at 39s. a head—that is to say, they agreed to buy them. M. went with one of the drovers to a public-house, ostensibly to hand him over the money, but really to gain time and to spend his five shillings in treating him, while N. remained with the other to dispose of his bargain at a profit, *if he could*. For a whole hour he did no business, but in the end he sold the flock at 40s. a head, realising £5 by the transaction. We talk of a bad quarter of an hour, but here were four of them for poor N. 'Suppose you had *not* sold them,' I said, 'would you not have got into a frightful row?' 'Very likely,' he said. 'All the time I was thinking less of the buyers than of Botany Bay.' For at that time we had transportation.

that school life should have those attractions, which it certainly possesses, for most boys, independent of the imaginary ones with which the glamour of 'the Past' invests it. I suppose the delight they take in sports of all kinds makes up for the discomforts they endure, while, having no particular literary bent, their dry mechanical studies are not more disagreeable to them than any other kind of reading would be. With the exception of what Mrs. Caudle calls 'the fine old athletic game of cribbage,' I, unfortunately, cared nothing for sports; and while I loved poetry and fiction, the lessons that were imposed upon me were absolutely hateful. To find myself comparatively my own master, with leisure for my private pursuits, was, therefore, like escaping from slavery.

My new tutor was one of the handsomest and most agreeable men I have ever known, of the most polished manners and charming social gifts of all kinds, and his family were as pleasant as himself. He lived in a large house, once the residence of a great lord, in Devonshire, commanding the most splendid views. After my previous experience of life, I seemed to myself (not unreasonably, I thought, if the theory of compensation was to be accepted) to have gone to heaven. As a young man, my new preceptor had been the pet of the aristocracy; had been private tutor to more than one duke, and had educated earls and viscounts without number. Many of them had expressed an extravagant regard for him, but their efforts to benefit him, when he came to need their assistance, were certainly not extravagant. He was comparatively a poor man when I first became acquainted with him, and had the pride which generally accompanies unaccustomed poverty. He would have died rather than have asked his noble friends for anything, and they took great care, as it seemed to me, never to inquire into his circumstances. One of them, a very great magnate indeed, wrote to request his dear old tutor to come up to Scotland and marry him. He did so, and not only received no guerdon from his gushing Grace, but was left to pay his own journey there and back. He never uttered a word of complaint, though I think he felt it; but it gave me a lesson with regard to the selfish callousness of the rich and powerful (with their motto of *noblesse oblige*, too!), which has never needed—though it has amply received—the corroboration of experience.

The preparation for Cambridge was a mere bagatelle, after what I had been accustomed to in the way of lessons, and though I never cared for University studies, I almost took a pleasure in

them for the teacher's sake. I can see myself now doing Euclid with him in his study, without book; he taught me to carry the figures, even of the sixth book (which are much belettered), in my head, and after a little practice I found no difficulty in it, and even some self-satisfaction. This, too, was the first and only time in my life that I have derived any satisfaction from what seems to please so many people—outdoor exercise.

I had some companions of my own age who taught me the use of the leaping pole, in which I became quite a remarkable proficient. We scoured the country each with a fourteen-foot pole in our hands, and rarely found brook or lane too broad for us. Many a time, like Commodore Trunnion, have I astonished a waggoner by flying from steep bank to bank, over the heads of himself and his horses. I could now, quite as easily, like the cow in the nursery rhyme, fly over the moon.

I have never seen it remarked, with relation to the effect of humour, that, notwithstanding the stupidity of all so-called practical jokes, a material drollery—something incongruous that actually happens—makes a more vivid and lasting impression upon the human mind than anything spoken. It has been my good fortune to have been familiar with more than one great humourist, and to have mixed generally with many utterers of good things. I remember some with great pleasure, but the recollection of them does not tickle me with the same irrepressible mirth as certain humorous *incidents*, which I can never recall, even in the silent watches of the night, without laughter. They owe something, of course, to the circumstances under which they took place, and therefore always lose in the telling; but to those who have experienced and can appreciate them they are solid lumps of delight, which no time can liquefy. One of these was vouchsafed to me while at my Devonshire tutor's. I have often told it, but I do not remember having ever put it into print.

On one occasion we had some private theatricals, for which a great hall in the centre of the house, approached by a long passage from the front door, afforded great facilities. One of the plays was a dress piece, exhibiting the Court of Queen Elizabeth. It was my frivolous disposition, perhaps, that caused me to be selected as the Court jester. A dear friend of mine (since dead, alas! like most of them) played Sir Walter Raleigh, and I well remember he took advantage of my being in a simple network garment to prick my unprotected limbs with the point of his rapier.



It was a snowy winter's night, and the hall was crowded with a very large audience, whose servants, including those of the house, were standing on the great staircase and in the galleries; and Sir Walter and I were in the long passage aforesaid waiting to 'come on,' when there came a ring at the front door. There was no one to answer it, as we knew, except ourselves. But who, at that time of night, two hours after the performance had begun, could it possibly be? 'By Jove,' whispered I, already trembling with the sense of the absurdity of what must needs come to pass, 'it's the new pupil!'

My tutor, I knew, was expecting one (from Wales) about that date, but in the hurry and bustle of the theatricals we had clean forgotten all about him. The bell rang again with increased violence. We opened the door, and there stood a little man, with a Bradshaw and a railway rug, just descended from a snow-covered fly. His gaze wandered from the knight in his doublet and hose to the fool in scarlet, and back again, in speechless astonishment. He had evidently a mind to turn and flee, but Sir Walter, with gentle violence, constrained him to enter. We led him along the passage, opened the door of the great hall, and pushed him on to the stage. The applause was deafening. The appearance of a modern railway traveller, with rug and guide, among the Court of Elizabeth, was thought to be part of an exquisite burlesque. The Queen wept tears of laughter, the courtiers roared, not from complaisance, but necessity; the whole house 'rose' at the unexpected visitor, who faced it with his mouth open. It was more than a minute before my tutor could understand what had happened. He came forward full of the politest apologies, marred by fits of uncontrollable mirth.

'My dear Mr. B., I cannot express my sorrow' (which was very true). 'What must you have thought of your reception, and of my house?'

The Welshman was plucky enough, and not unnaturally in a frightful rage. 'I thought it was a lunatic asylum, sir,' he answered bitterly.

Then we gave him three cheers, and one cheer more. The hero of that evening fell at Balaklava a few years afterwards; my tutor and three-fourths of that joyous company have long been dead; but when I think of that inimitable scene, the humour of it sweeps wavelike over all, and for one fleeting minute drowns regret.



The mention of theatricals reminds me that under my tutor's roof I had the pleasure of meeting the once famous Miss O'Neill. She stayed a fortnight in the house with her husband, Sir William Becher. Those, of ripe age, who saw her act, used to compare her, and not unfavourably, with Mrs. Siddons. This was the more remarkable since she left the stage on her marriage at a very early age. At the date of which I speak she was between fifty and sixty years of age: a tall commanding-looking woman, with a certain majesty in her mien and movements. She talked of 'the Garden' and 'the Lane,' and was very fond of recitation. I remember her giving us 'Hohenlinden,' one afternoon in the hall, in very fine style.

It was when I was a pupil in Devonshire that the meadows of manuscripts which I had written began to produce their first scanty crop of print.

A curious chapter might be written concerning the channels through which authors have first addressed the public. From the nature of the case, they have been mostly of a humble kind. One rarely writes for the 'Times' or the 'Edinburgh' at seventeen, or rather, though we may write *for* them (for young gentlemen of the pen are audacious enough), one's lucubrations are first 'accepted' in much more modest regions. Thackeray told me that the first money he had ever received in literature (under what circumstances he did not say, but they must have been droll ones) was from Mr. G. W. M. Reynolds. For my own part, I may, so far, have been said to have been born with a silver spoon in my mouth, for my literary godfather was no less a person than Leigh Hunt. In the flesh, I regret to say, I never knew him; but as a boy I had an admiration for him that was akin to love. I suppose no writer has ever preached the love of books so eloquently as he has done, or gained more disciples. He had a most kind and gracious nature, which was cultivated to extremity; culture is much more common nowadays than it was in his time, but unless the nature of the soil is gracious, very little comes of such 'top dressing.' Leigh Hunt combined with the 'fine brain' the tenderest of human hearts. His ignorance of business matters and his poverty made him to natures of the baser sort an object of ridicule. Carlyle used to keep three sovereigns in a little packet on his mantelpiece, which he called 'Leigh Hunt's sovereigns,' because he occasionally lent them to him, and was wont to narrate the circumstance to all whom it did *not* concern. Hunt would have lent *him* three

thousand sovereigns, had he possessed them, and never disclosed the circumstance.

There was nothing in his literary life which Dickens regretted so much as the unintentional wrong he did Leigh Hunt in his portrait of Harold Skimpole. It was true that he drew one side of it from his friend, but the other side—the selfishness and the baseness—had nought to do with him. They were indeed so utterly opposed to his character, that it seemed to Dickens that no one could associate them with the original of the picture. Nothing is more common than for a novelist to paint in this way and for the very purpose of the concealment of identity; but in this case the likeness was, in some points, too striking to escape recognition, and the others were taken for granted, whereat both painter and sitter were cruelly pained.

The first composition of my own which I had the bliss to see in print was a little poem called 'The Poet's Death'—a queer subject enough to *begin* a poetical career with—published in 'Leigh Hunt's Journal,' one of the many periodicals which owed their being to his sanguine temperament and the optimism of a publisher. It had a short life, and I am afraid not a merry one. Soon after, I wrote a series of 'Ballads from English History,' in 'Bentley's Miscellany,' of which I think, at that time, Harrison Ainsworth was the proprietor and editor. When I ventured, after half a dozen of them, or so, had made their appearance, to hint at payment, I received a note from Mr. Ainsworth explaining that 'the circumstances of the magazine were such that it could afford no *pecuniary* remuneration to its contributors.' The word '*pecuniary*' was italicised, as though I had received some remuneration of another kind. If I had had to trust to my muse for subsistence (though upon my word I still think I wrote very pretty poems) I should have died early unless some Dr. Tanner had communicated to me his secret of living without food. The only poem I ever got paid for was a humorous one which I had the pleasure to see the other day quoted in an American collection of 'anonymous and dead authors.' It was written upon a great friend of my boyhood, a painter called 'Jock.'

A rollicksome, frolicsome rare old cock  
As ever did nothing was our dog Jock;  
A gleesome, fleasome, affectionate beast,  
As slow at a fight, as swift at a feast;  
A wit among dogs, when his life 'gan fail,  
One couldn't but see the old wag in his tale,

When his years grew long and his eyes grew dim,  
And his course of bark could not strengthen him.  
Never more now shall our knees be press'd  
By his dear old chops in his slobbery rest,  
Nor our mirth be stirr'd at his solemn looks  
As wise, and as dull, as divinity books.  
Our old friend's dead, but we all well know  
He's gone to the kennels where the good dogs go,  
Where the cooks be not, but the beef-bones be,  
And his old head never need turn for a flea.



The proprietor of the object of this eulogy was so pleased with it that he placed it over the dog's tombstone, and much to his annoyance found he had a great deal more to pay the stonecutter than I had received for the original manuscript. In short, though at that time of my life, and long afterwards, I much preferred verse to prose, it soon became manifest to me that poetry would, in my case, be its own reward.

My first prose article found acceptance in 'Household Words.' It was the forerunner of scores and scores contributed to the same periodical, but no other gave me a tithe of the pleasure this one did. A mother's pride in seeing her firstborn in long clothes is no doubt considerable, but it is nothing to an author's delight upon the appearance of his first article in print. In this case, the well-known line, 'Half is his, and half is thine,' does not apply: the little creature is his very own, and, small as it is, plays the part of master of the ceremonies in introducing him to the world at large. From that moment he is no longer a private person, but an author. I don't know how many attempts I had made to obtain that *status* before I succeeded; the perseverance of Bruce's spider as compared with mine was mere impatience. If I could have foreseen how long it would be before I was fated to be successful again my happiness would have been not a little dashed; but as it was I was in the seventh heaven. Up to this day, when I look back upon the letter I received, announcing the acceptance of 'Gentleman Cadet' (a short sketch of life at the Academy), it awakens emotions. The writer was W. H. Wills, who assisted Dickens in his editorship, a man of kindly nature and (of this I was especially convinced just then) of excellent judgment. He was devoted to his chief, conscientious to his contributors, and an excellent fellow, as I had afterwards good reason to know; but it was a disappointment to me that I had not heard from 'the Master' himself. Even that,

however, I almost forgot when I received the *honorarium* (three guineas) for my little paper. It seemed to me that fame and fortune had both opened wide their gates to me at once. A lady novelist has written rapturously of the feelings that were aroused within her by the first kiss from her beloved object, though he was but a Detrimental; I felt like her, with the additional satisfaction of believing myself to have made an excellent match.

The first question that occurred to me was, What should I do with the money? It was a sum too small to invest, and too sacred to be frittered away: in the end I bought a pig with it. This requires a note of explanation. In Devonshire there are no pigs worthy of the name, only a kind of dog with a pigskin on it—a circumstance which much distressed my tutor, who was a judge of pigs, and admired them exceedingly. Accordingly, when I returned after my next vacation, I bought him a genuine specimen of the animal from Berkshire. Though country born and country bred, I was always extremely ignorant of country matters: a fine landscape delighted me, yet I scarcely knew an ash from an elm; and though I liked animals, I did so as a child likes them, without knowledge of their habits. To this day one of my objections to visiting at country houses is that so many of their owners compel one to feel an interest in their horses and cattle. ‘Perhaps you would like to see the stables,’ &c. All that I have always hated, and of course I knew nothing about pigs. The animal in question was chosen for me by an expert, and he (the animal) accompanied me, in a large hamper, by train to Devonshire. It was a very hot day in August, and it struck me, as I got out at Bristol for some liquid refreshment, that the poor pig must be thirsty too. I am now aware that it was an error in judgment, but it arose from a natural tenderness of heart. We had ten minutes to wait, but it was with some difficulty that I obtained the services of a porter for this (probably unique) performance. The station was in a state of great confusion; two excursion trains had come in, and there was a cattle market below stairs, he told me. However, we got my hamper and took it down in the lift to an unoccupied apartment; my four-footed friend never uttered a sound during this process—he was either dazed with unwonted travel, or preparing himself for some coming struggle; but I regarded him with the tenderest sympathy, believing him to be half dead with heat and drought. The porter procured a pan of water, and then proceeded to open the hamper. What took place next I cannot describe, for it happened in a mere

flash of time: there was a cry of panic, rage, and fear—a squeal is no word for it—a broken pan, a prostrate porter, and a mad pig gone! If the door had been closed, he would without doubt have bitten us both, but fortunately the man had left it open. The next moment the creature was in the market—the ‘open market,’ as it is called—but altogether out of *my* reach. He had joined a great band of pigs, though the owner denied it, and identification was out of the question. Such was the fate of the pecuniary proceeds of my first article.

In other respects, however, it was more fortunate; it made some little stir in the periodical world, and even in one region which may be fairly said to be remote from it. It came under the notice of the governor of the Woolwich Academy, who wrote to Dickens upon the subject, with some acerbity. When the faults of any educational establishment are indicated, I have always noticed that he who points them out is the subject of one of two kinds of attack. 1. If he has been there in person he ought to be ashamed of himself for suggesting that it falls short of perfection; he is a bird that fouls its own nest. 2. If by some slight inaccuracy of detail he betrays that he has received his information at second hand, then he knows nothing about it.

‘If your correspondent had been a cadet himself,’ wrote the general, ‘I should not have addressed you, but it is clear to me that he is an outsider.’ A courteous reply informed him that the writer of the article had been a cadet, on which the governor—evidently still in doubt—demanded his name. This was a course which, unless he had reason to believe he had been wilfully deceived, Charles Dickens was the last man to adopt, with respect to any contributor, without permission, and he wrote to me to ask it. It was the first of many letters that I have received from that kind and gracious hand, but none have given me so exquisite a pleasure. I was fortunately able to reply to his communication in a manner that not only satisfied himself, but the irascible general; and thus began an acquaintance which presently ripened into friendship, none the less sincere though the obligations in connection with it were, from first to last, all on one side.

## THE GIANT'S ROBE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'VICE VERSÂ.'

'Now does he feel his title  
Hang loose upon him, like a giant's robe  
Upon a dwarfish thief.'—*Macbeth*.

### CHAPTER XXVI.

#### VISITS OF CEREMONY.



R. LANGTON, on being informed that Mark Ashburn proposed to become his son-in-law, took a painfully prosaic view of the matter : 'I can quite understand the fascination of a literary career to a young man,' he had observed to Mark in the course of a trying interview ; 'indeed, when I was younger I was frequently suspected myself of contributing to "Punch;" but I always saw where that would lead me, and, as a matter of fact, I never did indulge my inclinations in

that direction,' he added, with the complacency of a St. Anthony. 'And the fact is, I wish my son-in-law to have a more assured position : you see, at present you have only written one book—oh, I am quite aware that "Illusion" was well received—remarkably so, indeed ; but then it remains to be proved whether you can follow up your success, and—and, in short, while that is uncertain I can't consent to any engagement ; you really must not ask me to do so.' And in this determination he was firm for some time, even though secretly impressed on hearing of the sum for which Mark had already disposed of his forth-

coming novel, and which represented, indeed, a very fair year's income. It was Uncle Solomon, after all, that proved the heavy piece of ordnance which turned the position at the crisis; he was flattered when his nephew took him into his confidence, and pleased that he should have 'looked so high,' which motives combined to induce him to offer his influence. It was a somewhat desperate remedy, and Mark had his doubts of the impression likely to be produced by such a relative, but it worked unexpectedly well. Mr. Lightowler was too cautious to commit himself to any definite promise, but he made it abundantly clear that he was a 'warm' man, and that Mark was his favourite nephew, for whom he was doing something as it was, and might do more if he continued to behave himself. After the interview in which this was ascertained, Mr. Langton began to think that his daughter might do worse than marry this young Ashburn after all. Mrs. Langton had liked Mark from the first in her languid way, and the fact that he had 'expectations' decided her to support his cause; he was not a brilliant *parti*, of course, but at least he was more eligible than the young men who had been exciting her maternal alarm of late. And under her grandfather's will Mabel would be entitled on her marriage or coming of age to a sum which would keep her in comfort whatever happened.

All these considerations had their effect, and Mr. Langton, seeing how deeply his daughter's heart was concerned, withdrew his opposition, and even allowed himself to be persuaded that there was no reason for a long engagement, and that the marriage might be fixed to take place early in the following spring. He only made two stipulations: one, that Mark should insure his life in the usual manner; and the other, that he should abandon his *nom de plume* at once, and in the next edition of 'Illusion,' and in all future writings, use the name which was his by birth. 'I don't like *aliases*,' he said; 'if you win a reputation, it seems to me your wife and family should have the benefit of it;' and Mark agreed to both conditions with equal cheerfulness.

Mr. Humpage, as may be imagined, was not best pleased to hear of the engagement; he wrote a letter of solemn warning to Mabel and her father, and this being disregarded, he nursed his resentment in offended silence. If Harold Caffyn was polite enough when in his uncle's company to affect to share his indignation to the full, elsewhere he accepted Mark's good fortune with cheerful indifference; he could meet Mabel with perfect



equanimity, and listen to her mother's somewhat discursive eulogies of her future son-in-law with patience, if not entire assent. Since his autumn visit to the Featherstones, there had been changes in his position which may have been enough to account for his philosophy; he had gained the merchant's good opinion to such an extent that the latter, in defiance of his wife's cautions, had taken the unusual step of proposing that the young actor should give up the stage and occupy a recently vacated desk in Mr. Featherstone's own palatial City offices. Even if his stage ambition had not cooled long since, Caffyn was not the man to neglect such a chance as this; he accepted gratefully, and already the merchant saw his selection, unlikely as it had seemed at first, beginning to be justified by his *protégé's* clear head and command of languages, while Gilda's satisfaction at the change was at least equal to her father's. And so, whether Harold was softened by his own prosperity, and whether other hopes or distractions came between him and his former passion for revenge, he remained impassive throughout all the preparations for a marriage which he could have prevented had he chosen. At Triberg the thought that Mark (who had, as he considered, been the chief means of ruining his hopes of Mabel) was to be his successful rival had for an instant revived the old spirit; but now he could face the fact with positive contentment, and his feeling towards Mark was rather one of contemptuous amusement than of any actual hostility.

Mark's introduction of Mabel to his family had not been altogether a success; he regretted that he had carelessly forgotten to prepare them for his visit as soon as he pulled the bell-handle by the gate, and caught a glimpse of scared faces at one or two of the windows, followed by sounds from within of wild scurry and confusion—'like a lot of confounded rabbits!' he thought to himself in disgust. Then they had been kept waiting in a chilly little drawing-room, containing an assortment of atrocities in glass, china, worsted, and wax, until Mark moved restlessly about in his nervous irritation, and Mabel felt her heart sink in spite of her love; she had not expected to find Mark's people in luxurious surroundings, but she was unprepared for anything quite so hideous as that room. When Mrs. Ashburn, who had felt that this was an occasion for some attention to toilette, made her appearance, it was hardly a reassuring one: she was not exactly vulgar perhaps, but she was hard, Mabel thought, narrow and ungenial; but the fact was that the consciousness of having been

taken unawares robbed her welcome of any cordiality which it might otherwise have possessed. She inferred from her first glance at Mabel's pretty walking costume a fondness for dress and extravagance, which branded her at once as a 'worldling,' between



whom and herself there could be nothing in common—in which last opinion she was most probably right, as all Mabel's efforts to sustain a conversation could not save it from frequent lapses. Martha, from shyness as much as stiffness, sat by in almost complete silence; and though Trixie, the only other member of

the family who appeared, was evidently won at once by Mabel's appearance, and did all she could to cover the others' shortcomings, she was not sufficiently at her ease to break the chill; and Mark, angry and ashamed as he was, felt paralysed himself under its influence.

On the way back he was unusually silent, from a fear of the impression such an ordeal as she had gone through must have left upon Mabel; and the fact that she did not refer to the interview herself did not reassure him. He need not have been afraid, however; she was not in the least deterred by what she had seen. The sight of the home in which he had been brought up had filled her with a loving pity, suggesting as it did the petty constraints and miseries, the unloveliness of all surroundings, and the total want of appreciation which he must have endured there. And yet all this had not soured him; in spite of it he had produced a great book, strong, yet refined and tender, and free from any taint of narrowness or cynicism. As she thought of this and glanced at Mark's handsome face, so bright and animated in general, but clouded now with the melancholy which his fine eyes could express at times, she longed to say something to relieve it, and yet shrank from being the first to speak in her fear of jarring him.

Mark spoke at last. 'Well, Mabel,' he said, looking down at her with a rather doubtful smile, 'I told you that my mother was a—little peculiar.'

'Yes,' said Mabel frankly; 'we didn't quite get on together, did we, Mark? We shall some day, perhaps; and even if not—I shall have you!' And she laid her hand on his sleeve with a look of perfect understanding and contentment which, little as he deserved it, chased away all his fears.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

CLEAR SKY—AND A THUNDERBOLT.



HO,' says George Eliot, somewhere, 'can pinch into its pilulous smallness the cobweb of pre-matrimonial acquaintance?' And, to press the metaphor, the cobweb, as far as Mark and Mabel were concerned, brilliantly as it shone in all its silken iridescence, would have rolled up into a particularly small pill. Mark was anxious that his engagement should be as short as possible, chiefly from an uneasy fear that his great happiness might

elude him after all. The idea of losing Mabel became day by day, as he knew her better, a more intolerable torture, and he could not rest until all danger of that was at an end. Mabel had no fears of a future in which Mark would be by her side; and if she was not blind to some little weaknesses in his character, they did not affect her love and admiration in the least—she was well content that her hero should not be unpleasantly perfect. And the weeks slipped by, until Easter, which fell early that year, had come and gone; the arrangements for the wedding were all completed, and Mark began to breathe more freely as he saw his suspense drawing to a happy end.

It was a bleak day towards the end of March, and Mark was walking across the Park and Gardens from his rooms in South Audley Street to Malakoff Terrace, charged with a little note from Mabel to Trixie, to which he was to bring back an answer; for, although Mabel had not made much progress in the affections of the rest of the Ashburn household, a warm friendship had sprung up already between herself and Mark's youngest sister—the only

one of them who seemed to appreciate and love him as he deserved. He felt buoyant and happy as he walked briskly on, with the blustering north-easter at his back seeming to clear his horizon of the last clouds which had darkened it. A very few days more and Mabel would be his own—beyond the power of man to sunder! and soon, too, he would be able to salve the wound which still rankled in his conscience—he would have a book of his own. 'Sweet Bells jangled' was to appear almost immediately, and he had come to have high hopes of it; it looked most imposing in proof—it was so much longer than 'Illusion'; he had worked up a series of such overwhelming effects in it; its pages contained matter to please every variety of taste—flippancy and learning, sensation and sentiment, careful dissection of character and audacious definition and epigram—failure seemed to him almost impossible. And when he could feel able to lay claim legitimately to the title of genius, surely then the memory of his fraud would cease to reproach him—the means would be justified by the result. He amused himself in composing various critiques on the book (all of course highly eulogistic), and thus pleasantly occupied the way until he gained the cheerful Kensington High Street, the first half of which seems to belong to some bright little market town many miles further from Charing Cross. In the road by the kerbstone he passed a street singer, a poor old creature in a sun-bonnet, with sharp features that had been handsome once, and brilliant dark eyes, who was standing there unregarded, singing some long-forgotten song with the remnants of a voice. Mark's happiness impelled him to put some silver into her hand, and he felt a half-superstitious satisfaction as he heard the blessing she called down on him—as if she might have influence.

No one was at home at Malakoff Terrace but Trixie, whom he found busily engaged in copying an immense plaster nose. 'Jack says I must practise at features before I can get into the antique,' she explained, 'and so he gave me this nose; it's his first present, and considered a very fine cast, Jack says.'

'Never saw a finer nose anywhere,' said Mark—'looks as if it had been forced, eh, Trixie?'

'Mark, don't!' cried Trixie, shocked at this irreverence; 'it's *David's*—Michael Angelo's David!' He gave her Mabel's note. 'I can't write back because my hands are all charcoaly,' she explained; 'but you can say, "My love, and I will if I possibly can;" and, oh yes, tell her I had a letter from *him* this morning.'

'Meaning Jack?' said Mark. 'All right, and—oh, I say, Trixie, why won't the governor and mater come to my wedding?'

'It's all ma,' said Trixie; 'she says she should only feel herself out of place at a fashionable wedding, and she's better away.'

'It's to be a very quiet affair, though, thank Heaven!' observed Mark.

'Yes, but don't you see what she really wants is to be able to feel injured by being out of it all—if she can, she'll persuade herself in time that she never was invited at all; you know what dear ma is!'

'Well,' said Mark, with considerable resignation, 'she must do as she pleases, of course. Have you got anything else to tell me, Trixie, because I shall have to be going soon?'

'You mustn't go till I've given you something that came for you—oh, a long time ago, when ma was ill. You see it was like this: ma had her breakfast in bed, and there was a tray put down on the slab where it was, and it was sticky underneath or something, and so it stuck to the bottom, and the tray wasn't wanted again, and Ann, of course, didn't choose to wash it, so she only found it yesterday and brought it to me.'

'Trixie,' said Mark, 'I can't follow all those "its." I gather that I'm entitled to something sticky, but I haven't a notion what. Hadn't you better get it, whatever it happens to be?'

'Why, it's a letter of course, goose!' said Trixie. 'I told you *that* the very first thing: wait here, and I'll bring it to you.'

So Mark waited patiently in the homely little back parlour, where he had prepared his work as a schoolboy in the old days, where he had smoked his first cigar in his first Cambridge vacation. He smiled as he thought how purely intellectual his enjoyment of that cigar had been, and how for the first time he had appreciated the meaning of 'the bitter end;' he was smiling still when Trixie returned.

'Whom do you know in India, Mark?' she said curiously; 'perhaps it's some admirer who's read the book. I hope it's nothing really important; if it is, it wasn't our fault that—Mark, you're not *ill*, are you?'

'No,' said Mark, placing himself with his back to the light, and stuffing the letter, after one hasty glance at the direction, unopened into his pocket. 'Of course not—why should I be?'

'Is there anything in the letter to worry you?' persisted Trixie. 'It can't be a bill, can it?'

'Never mind what it is,' said Mark; 'have you got the keys? I—I should like a glass of wine.'

'Ma left the keys in the cupboard,' said Trixie; 'how lucky! port or sherry, Mark?'

'Brandy, if there is any,' he said, with an effort.

'Brandy! oh, Mark, have you taken to drinking spirits, and so early in the morning?' she asked, with an anxious misgiving that perhaps that was *de rigueur* with all literary men.

'No, no, don't be absurd. I want some just now, and quick, do you hear? I caught a chill walking across,' he explained.

'You had better try to eat something with it, then,' she advised; 'have some cake?'

'Do you want to make me ill in earnest?' he retorted peevishly, thrusting away the brown cake, with a stale flavour of cupboard about it, with which Trixie tried to tempt him; 'there, it's all right—there's nothing the matter, I tell you.' And he poured out the brandy and drank it. There was a kind of comfort, or rather distraction, in the mere physical sensation to his palate; he thought he understood why some men took to drinking. 'Ha!' and he made a melancholy attempt at the sigh of satisfaction which some people think expected of them after spirits. 'Now I'm a man again, Trixie; that has driven off the chill. I'll be-off now.'

'Are you *sure* you're quite well again?' she said anxiously. 'Very well, then I shan't see you again till you're in church next Tuesday; and oh, Mark, I do so hope you'll be very, very happy!' He was on the door-step by this time, and made no reply, while he kept his face turned from her.

'Good-bye, then,' she said; 'you won't forget my message to Mabel, will you?'

'Let me see, what was it?' he said. 'Ah, I remember; your love, and you will if you can, eh?'

'Yes, and say I've had a letter from him this morning,' she added.

He gave a strange laugh, and then, as he turned, she saw how ghastly and drawn his face looked.

'Have you though?' he said wildly; 'so have I, Trixie, so have I!' And before she could ask any further questions he was gone.

He walked blindly up the little street and into the main road again, unable at first to think with any clearness: he had not read



the letter; the stamp and handwriting on the envelope were enough for him. The bolt had fallen from a clear sky, the thing he had only thought of as a nightmare had really happened—the sea had given up its dead! He went on; there was the same old woman in the sun-bonnet, still crooning the same song; he laughed bitterly to think of the difference in his own life since he had last seen her—only a short half-hour ago. He passed the parish church, from which a wedding party was just driving, while the bells clashed merrily under the graceful spire—no wedding bells would ever clash for him now. But he must read that letter and know the worst. Holroyd was alive—that he knew; but had he found him out? did that envelope contain bitter denunciations of his treachery. Perhaps he had already exposed him! he could not rest until he knew how this might be, and yet he dared not read his letter in the street. He thought he would find out a quiet spot in Kensington Gardens and read it there; alone—quite alone. He hurried on, with a dull irritation that the High Street should be so long and so crowded, and that everybody should make such a point of getting in the way; the shock had affected his body as well as his mind; he was cold to the bones, and felt a dull numbing pressure on the top of his head; and yet he welcomed these symptoms, too, with an odd satisfaction; they seemed to entitle him to some sympathy. He reached the Gardens at last, but when he had turned in at the little postern door near the ‘King’s Arms,’ he could not prevail upon himself to open the letter—he tore it half open and put it back irresolutely; he must find a seat and sit down. He struck up the hill, with the wind in his teeth now, until he came to the Round Pond, where there was quite a miniature sea breaking on the south-western rim of the basin; a small boy was watching a solitary ship labouring far out in the centre, and Mark stood and watched it too, mechanically, till he turned away at last with a nervous start of impatience. Once he had sailed ships on those waters; what would he not give if those days could come back to him again, or if even he could go back these past few months to the time when his conscience was clear and he feared no man! But the past was irrevocable; he had been guilty of this reckless, foolish fraud, and now the consequences were upon him! He walked restlessly on under the bare tossing branches, looking through the black trunks and across the paths glimmering white in the blue-grey distance for a seat where he might be safe from interruption, until at last he discovered a

clumsy wooden bench, scored and slashed with the sand-ingrained initials of a quarter of a century's idleness, a seat of the old uncomfortable pattern gradually dying out from the walks. He could wait no longer, and was hurrying forward to secure it, when he was hailed by some one approaching by one of the Bayswater paths, and found that he had been recognised by Harold Caffyn.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## MARK KNOWS THE WORST.



To avoid Caffyn was out of the question, and so Mark waited for him with as much self-control as he could muster, as he strolled leisurely up. Caffyn's quick eyes saw at once that something unusual had happened, and he resolved to find out what that was before they parted. 'Thought it must be you,' he began; 'so you've come out here to meditate on your coming happiness, have you? Come

along and pour out some of your raptures, it will do you good; and you don't know what a listener I can be.'

'Not now,' said Mark uneasily; 'I—I think I would rather be alone.'

'Nonsense!' said Caffyn briskly; 'you don't really mean that, I know. Why, I'm going away to-morrow to the lakes. I must have a little talk with you before I go.'

'What are you going there for?' said Mark, without much show of interest.

'My health, my boy; old Featherstone has let me out for a fortnight's run, and I'm going to see what mountain air can do for me.'

'And where are you going now?' asked Mark.

'Now? Well, I *was* going across to see if the Featherstones

would give me some lunch, but I'm in no hurry. I'll go wherever *you* want to go.'

'Thanks,' said Mark, 'but—but I won't take you out of your way.'

'It's not taking me out of my way a bit, I assure you, my boy, and we haven't had a talk together for ages, so come along.'

'I can't,' said Mark, more uncomfortably still. 'I have some—some business which I must see to alone.'

'Odd sort of place this for business! No, no, Master Mark, it won't do; I've got you; and I mean to stick to you; you know what a tactless beggar I can be when I like. Seriously, do you think I can't see there's something wrong? I'm hanged if I think it's safe to let you go about alone while you're looking like this; it isn't any—any hitch at Kensington Park Gardens, is it?' and there was a real anxiety in his tone as he asked this.

'No,' said Mark shortly, 'it's not that.'

'Have you got into any trouble, then, any scrape you don't see your way out of? You might do worse than tell me all about it.'

'There's nothing to tell,' said Mark, goaded past prudence by this persistence; 'it's only a letter, a rather important letter, which I brought out here to read quietly.'

'Why the deuce couldn't you say so before?' cried Caffyn. 'I won't interrupt you; read your letter by all means, and I'll walk up and down here till you're ready for me—only don't make me think *you* want to cut me; you might wait till you're married for that, and you ought to know very well (if you don't) why I've been obliged, as it is, to decline the invitation to the marriage feast.'

Mark saw that for some reason Caffyn did not mean to be shaken off just then, and, as he could bear the suspense no longer, and knew that to walk about with Caffyn and talk indifferently of his coming happiness with that letter unread in his pocket would drive him mad, he had no choice but to accept the compromise. So he went to the bench and began to open the letter with trembling hands, while Caffyn paced up and down at a discreet distance. 'I see what it is now,' he thought, as he noticed the foreign envelope, 'I'm uncommonly glad I came up just then. Will he go through with it after this? Will he tell me anything, I wonder? Very little, I fancy, of what I know already. We shall see.'

This was the letter which Mark read, while the north-east wind roared through the boughs overhead, driving the gritty

shell-dust in his face, and making the thin paper in his fingers flap with its vicious jerks :—

‘ Talipot Bungalow, Newera Ellia, Ceylon.

‘ MY DEAR MARK,—I am not going to reproach you for your long silence, as I dare say you waited for me to write first. I have been intending to write again and again, and have been continually prevented, but I hardly expected to hear from you unless you had anything of importance to tell me. Something, however, has just come to my knowledge here which makes me fancy that you might have other reasons for not writing.’ (‘What does he mean by that?’ thought Mark, in sudden terror, and for a moment dared not read on.) ‘Have you by some strange chance been led to believe that I was on board the unfortunate “Mangalore” at the time of the disaster? because I see, on looking over some old Indian papers at the club here, that my name appears on the list of missing. As a matter of fact, I left the ship at Bombay. I had arranged to spend a day or two with some people, old friends of my father’s, who have a villa on the Malabar Hill, but on my arrival there found a telegram from Ceylon, warning me to lose no time if I wished to see my father alive. The “Mangalore” was to stop several more days at Bombay, and I decided to go on at once overland to Madras and take my chance there of a steamer for Colombo, leaving my hosts to send down word to the ship of my change of plan. I can only suppose that there was some misunderstanding about this, and even then I cannot understand how the steward could have returned me as on board under the circumstances; but if only the mistake has given you no distress it is not of much consequence, as I wrote since my arrival here to the only other quarter in which the report might have caused alarm. To continue my story, I was fortunate enough to catch a boat at Madras, and so reached Colombo some time before the “Mangalore” was due there, and as I went on at once to Yatagalla, it is not to be wondered at if in that remote part of the country—up in Oudapusilava, in the hill district—it was long before I even heard of the wreck. There was not much society there, as you may imagine, the neighbouring estates being mostly held by native planters or managers, with whom my father had never, even when well, been at all intimate. Well, my poor father rallied a little and lingered for some time after my arrival. His condition required my constant care, and I trust I was able to be of some

comfort to him. When he died I thought it best to do what I could, with the overseer's assistance, to carry on the plantation until there was a good opportunity of disposing of it, and for a time it did seem as if my efforts were going to be rewarded—the life was hard and lonely enough, but it had its charms for a solitary man like myself. Then everything seemed to go wrong at once. We had a bad season to begin with, and next fungus suddenly showed itself on the estate, and soon spread to such an extent that as a coffee plantation the place is quite worthless now, though I dare say they will be able to grow tea or cinchona on it. I have done with Yatagalla myself, having just succeeded in getting rid of it; naturally, not for a very large price per acre, but still I shall have enough altogether to live upon if I decide to carry on my old profession, or to start me fairly in some other line. But I am coming home first. (I can't call this island, lovely as most of it is, home.) There is nothing to keep me here any longer except my health, which has been anything but good for the last few months. I have been down with fever after fever; and this place, which I was ordered to as a health resort, is too damp and chilly to get really well in. So I shall make an effort to leave in about a fortnight by the P. and O. "Coromandel," which they tell me is a comfortable boat. After my experience of the "Mangalore" I prefer to trust this time to the regular "liners." I write this chiefly to ask you to do me a kindness if you possibly can. I have a sort of longing to see a friendly face on landing, and lately I have come to persuade myself that after all you may have good news to meet me with. Can you come? I have no time-tables here, but I calculate that the ship will reach Plymouth some time during the Easter holidays, so that, even if you are still at St. Peter's, your school duties will not prevent your coming. You can easily get the exact time we arrive by inquiring at the P. and O. offices in Leadenhall Street. We shall meet so soon now that I need write no more. As it is there is another letter I must write—if I can, for you would hardly believe how difficult I find it to write at all in my present state, though a sea voyage will set me up again.'

The letter ended rather abruptly, the writing becoming almost illegible towards the close, as if the writer's strength had gradually failed him. Mark came to the end with a feeling that was almost relief; his chief dread had been to hear that he was found out, and that his exposure might be made public before he could make

Mabel his own. It was terrible to know that the man he had injured was alive, but still it was something that he was still unaware of his injury; it was a respite, and, to a man of Mark's temperament, that was much. Even if Holroyd were strong enough to take his passage by the 'Coromandel,' he could hardly be in England for at least another fortnight, and long before he arrived at Plymouth the wedding would have taken place. And in a fortnight he might be able to hit upon something to soften some of the worse aspects of his fraud; the change in the title of the book, in the *nom de plume*, and even the alterations of the text might be explained; but then there was that fatal concession of allowing his real name to appear: it was, he knew, to be placed on the title-page of the latest edition—would there be time to suppress that? This occurred to him but vaguely, for it seemed just then as if, when Mabel were once his wife, no calamity could have power to harm him, and now nothing Holroyd could do would prevent the marriage. After that the Deluge!

So he was almost his usual self as he rose and came towards Caffyn; his hand, however, still trembled a little, causing him to bungle in replacing the letter and drop the envelope, which the other obligingly picked up and restored to him.

'Ashburn, my dear fellow,' he began, as they walked on together, 'I hope you won't think me impertinent, but I couldn't help seeing the writing on that envelope, and it seems to me I knew it once, and yet—do you mind telling me if it's from any one I know?'

Mark would of course have preferred to say nothing, but it seemed best on the whole to avoid suspicion by telling the truth. Caffyn, as a friend of Vincent's, would hear it before long; it might look odd if he made any secret of it now, and so he told the tale of the escape much as the letter had given it. His companion was delighted, he laughed with pleasure, and congratulated Mark on the joy he supposed him to feel, until the latter could hardly bear it.

'Who would have hoped for this,' he said, 'when we were talking about the dead coming to life some time ago, eh? and yet it's happened—poor, dear old Vincent! And did you say he is coming home soon?'

'Very soon; in about a fortnight,' said Mark; 'he—he wants me to go down to Plymouth and meet him, but of course I can't do that.'

'A fortnight!' cried Caffyn. 'Capital! But how do you make it out, though?'

'Easily,' said Mark; 'he talks of coming by the "Coromandel" and starting about a fortnight after he wrote—so——'

'I see,' said Caffyn; 'I suppose you've looked at the date? No? Then let me—look here, it's more than five weeks old—look at the postmark—why, it's been in England nearly a fortnight!'

'It was delayed at my people's,' said Mark, not seeing the importance of this at first, 'that's how it was.'

'But—but don't you see?' Caffyn said, excitedly for him, 'if he really has sailed by this "Coromandel," he must be very near now. He might even be in at Plymouth by this time.'

'Good God!' groaned Mark, losing all control as the truth flashed upon him, while the grey grass heaved under his unstable feet.

Caffyn was watching him, with a certain curiosity which was not without a malicious amusement. 'You didn't expect that,' he said. 'It's capital, isn't it?'

'Capital!' murmured Mark.

'He'll be in time for your wedding,' pursued Caffyn.

'Yes,' said Mark heavily, 'he'll be in time for that now.'

Yes, his doom was advancing upon him fast, and he must wait patiently for it to fall; he was tied down, without possibility of escape, unless he abandoned all hope of Mabel. Perhaps he might as well do that first as last.

'Well,' said Caffyn, 'what are you going to do about it?'

'Do?' echoed Mark. 'What can I do? I shall see him soon enough, I suppose.'

'That's a composed way of expecting a long-lost friend, certainly,' said Caffyn, laughing.

'Can't you understand,' retorted Mark, 'that—that situated as I am . . . coming at such a time as this . . . even a man's dearest friend might be—might be——'

'Rather in the way? Why, of course, I never thought of that—shows how dull I'm getting! He *will* be in the way—deucedly in the way, if he comes! After all, though, he may *not* come!'

'Let us find out,' said Mark; 'surely there's some way of finding out.'

'Oh yes,' said Caffyn. 'I dare say they can tell us at the offices. We'll have a cab and drive there now, and then we shall know what to do. Leadenhall Street, isn't it?'



They walked sharply across to the Bayswater Road, where they could get a hansom; and as they drove along towards the City, Mark's hopes began to rise. Perhaps Holroyd was not on board the 'Coromandel'—and then he tried to prepare himself for the



contrary. How should he receive Vincent when he came? for of course he would seek him out at once. The desperate idea of throwing himself on his friend's mercy occurred to him; if he could be the first to tell Holroyd the truth, surely he would consent to arrange the matter without any open scandal! He

would not wish to ruin him so long as he received his own again. Both Caffyn and Mark were very silent during that long and wearisome drive, with its frequent blocks in the crowded City thoroughfares; and when they arrived at last at the courtyard in front of the offices, Mark said to his companion, '*You manage this, will you?*' for he felt quite unequal to the task himself.

They had to wait some time at a broad mahogany counter before a clerk was at liberty to attend to them, for the office was full of people making various inquiries or paying passage money. Mark cursed the deliberation with which the man before them was choosing his berth on the cabin plan submitted to him, but at last the precautions against the screw and the engines and the kitchens were all taken, and the clerk proceeded to answer Caffyn's questions in the fullest and most obliging manner. He went with them to the telegram boards by the doors, and after consulting a despatch announcing the '*Coromandel's*' departure from Gibraltar, said that she would probably be at Plymouth by the next evening, or early on the following morning.

'Now find out if *he's* on board her,' said Mark; and his heart almost stopped when the clerk came back with a list of passengers and ran his finger down the names.

'V. B. Holroyd—is that your friend? If you think of meeting him at Plymouth, you have only to see our agents there, and they will let you know when the tender goes out to take the passengers ashore.'

After that Mark made his way out blindly, followed by Caffyn. 'Let us talk here, it's quieter,' said the latter when they were in the courtyard again.

'What's the good of talking?' said Mark.

'Don't you think you ought to go down to Plymouth?' suggested Caffyn.

'No,' said Mark, 'I don't. How can I, now?'

'Oh, I know you're wanted for exhibition, and all that, but you could plead business for one day.'

'What is the use?' said Mark. 'He will come to me as soon as he gets to town.'

'No, he won't, my boy,' said Caffyn; 'he will go and see the Langtons even before such a devoted friend as you are. Didn't you know he was like one of the family there?'

'I have heard them mention him,' said the unhappy Mark, on whom a dreadful vision had flashed of Holroyd learning the truth

by some innocent remark of Mabel's. 'I—I didn't know they were intimate.'

'Oh yes,' said Caffyn; 'they'll make a tremendous fuss over him. Now look here, my dear fellow, let's talk this over without any confounded sentiment. Here's your wedding at hand, and here's a long-lost intimate friend about to turn up in the midst of it. You'd very much prefer him to stay away; there's nothing to be ashamed of in that. I should myself if I were in your shoes. No fellow cares about playing second fiddle at his own wedding. Now, I've got a little suggestion to make. I was going down to Wastwater to-morrow; but I wouldn't much mind waiting another day if I could only get a fellow to come with me. I always liked Holroyd, you know—capital good chap he is; and if you leave me to manage him, I believe I could get him to come. I own I rather funk Wastwater all alone at this time of year.'

'He wouldn't go,' said Mark hopelessly.

'He would go there as readily as anywhere else, if you left it to me. I tell you what,' he added, as if the idea had just occurred to him: 'suppose I go down to Plymouth and catch him there? I don't mind the journey a bit.'

'No,' said Mark, 'I am going to meet him. I must be the first to see him. After that, if he likes to go away with you, he can.'

'Then you *are* going down after all!' said Caffyn. 'What are you going to say to him?'

'That is my affair,' said Mark.

'Oh, I beg pardon; I only meant that if you say anything to him about this wedding, or even let him think the Langtons are in town, I may as well give up any idea of getting him to come away with me. Look here! You might do me a good turn, particularly when you know you won't be sorry to get him off your hands yourself. Tell him you're going abroad in a day or two (that's true—you're going to Switzerland for your honeymoon, you know), and let him think the Langtons are away somewhere on the Continent; it's all for his good, he'll want mountain air and a cheerful companion like me to put him right again. He'll be the first to laugh at an innocent little deception like that.'

But Mark had done with deceptions, as he told himself: 'I shall tell him what I think he ought to know,' he said firmly, and Caffyn, with all his keenness, mistook the purpose in his mind.

'I'll take that for an answer,' he said, 'and I shan't leave

town to-morrow on the chance of his being able to go.' And so they parted.

'Ought I to have let him see that I knew?' Caffyn was thinking when he was alone again. 'No, I don't want to frighten him. I think he will play my game without it.'

Mark went back to the Langtons and dined there. Afterwards he told Mabel privately that he would be obliged to leave town for a day or two on pressing business. There was no mistaking his extreme reluctance to go, and she understood that only the sternest necessity took him away at such a time, trusting him too entirely to ask any questions.

But as they parted she said, 'It's only for two days, Mark, isn't it?'

'Only for two days,' he answered.

'And soon we shall be together—you and I—for all our lives,' she said softly, with a great happiness in her low tones. 'I ought to be able to give you up for just two days, Mark!'

Before those two days were over, he thought, she might give him up for ever! and the thought that this was possible made it difficult for him to part as if all were well. He went back and passed a sleepless night, thinking over the humiliating task he had set himself. His only chance of keeping Mabel now lay in making a full confession to Holroyd of his perfidy; he would offer a complete restitution in time. He would plead so earnestly that his friend *must* forgive him, or at least consent to stay his hand for the present; he would humble himself to any extent, if that would keep him from losing Mabel altogether—anything but that. If he lost her now, the thought of the happiness he had missed so narrowly would drive him mad.

It was a miserably cold day when he left Paddington, and he shivered under his rug as he sat in the train; he could hardly bear the cheerful talk of meeting or parting friends at the various stations at which the train stopped. He would have welcomed a collision which would deal him a swift and painless death, and free him from the misery he had brought upon himself; he would have been glad, like the lover in 'The Last Ride together,' although for very different reasons, if the world could end that day, and his guilt be swallowed up in the sum of iniquity. But no collision occurred, and (as it is perhaps unnecessary to add) the universe did not gratify him by dissolving on that occasion; the train brought him safely to the Plymouth platform, and left him there

to face his difficulty alone. It was about six o'clock in the evening, and he lost no time in inquiring at his hotel for the P. and O. agents, and in making his way to their offices up the stony streets, and along a quiet lane over the hill by Hoegate. He was received with courtesy, and told all that he wished to know: the 'Coromandel' was not in yet, would not be in now until after dark—if then; they would send him word if the tender was to go out the next morning, said the agent as he wrote him the necessary order to go on board her. After that Mark went back to the hotel and dined, or rather attempted to dine, in the big coffee-room by the side of a blazing fire that was powerless to thaw the cold about his heart, and then he retired to the smoking-room, which he had all to himself, and where he sat staring grimly at the leather benches and cold marble-topped tables around him, while he could hear muffled music and applause from the theatre hard by, varied by the click of the balls in the billiard-room at the end of the corridor. Presently the waiter announced a messenger for him, and on going out into the hall he found a man of seafaring appearance who brought him a card, stating that the tender would leave the Millbay Pier at six the next morning, by which time the 'Coromandel' would most probably be in. Mark went up to his bedroom that night as to a condemned cell; he had dreaded another night of sleepless tossing; sleep came to him, however, merciful and dreamless, as it will sometimes to those in desperate case, but he yielded to it with terror as he felt it coming upon him—for it brought the morning nearer.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

ON BOARD THE 'COROMANDEL.'



IT WAS quite dark the next morning when the hammering of the 'boots' outside the door roused Mark to a miserable sense of the unwelcome duty before him. He dressed by candlelight, and, groping his way down the silent staircase, hunted about in the shuttered coffee-room for the coat and hat he had left there, and went shivering out into the main street, from which he turned up the hill towards the Hoe. The day had dawned by that time, and the sky was a gloomy grey, varied towards the horizon by gleams of stormy yellow; the prim clean streets were deserted, save by an occasional workman going to his labours with a heavy tramp echoing on the wet flags. Mark went along by terraces of lodging-houses, where the placards of 'apartments' had an especially forlorn and futile look against the drawn blinds, and from the areas of which the exhalations, confined during the night, rose in perceptible contrast with the fresh morning air. Then he found himself upon the Hoe, with its broad asphalt promenades and rows of hotels and terraces, rain-washed, silent, and cold, and descending the winding series of steps, he made his way to the Millbay Pier, and entered the Custom House gates. Waiting about the wharf was a little knot of people, apparently bound on much the same errand as himself—although in far higher spirits. Their cheerfulness (probably a trifle aggravated by the consciousness of being up so early) jarred upon him, and he went on past them to the place where two small steamers were lying.

'One of 'em's agoin' out to the "Coromandel" presently,' said a sailor in answer to his question; 'you'd better wait till the agent's down, or you may be took out to the wrong ship—for there's two expected, but they ain't neither of 'em in yet. Ah!' as a gun was heard outside, 'that 'll be the "Coromandel" signallin' now.'

'That ain't her,' said another man, who was leaning over the side of one of the tenders, 'that's the t'other one—the "Emu;" the "Coromandel's" a three-master, *she* is.'

'Tom knows the "Coromandel,"—don't ye, Tom?—Let Tom alone for knowing the "Coromandel!"' said the first sailor—a remark which apparently was rich in hidden suggestion, for they both laughed very heartily.

Presently the agent appeared, and Mark, having satisfied himself that there was no danger of being taken out to the wrong vessel (for, much as he dreaded meeting Holroyd, he dreaded missing him even more), went on board one of the tenders, which soon after began to move out into the dull green water. Now that he was committed to the ordeal his terrors rose again; he almost wished that he had made a mistake after all, and was being taken out to meet the wrong P. and O. The horrible fear possessed him that Holroyd might in some way have learned his secret on the voyage home. Suppose, for instance, a fellow-passenger possessed a copy of 'Illusion,' and chanced to lend it to him—what should he do if his friend were to meet him with a stern and contemptuous repulse, rendering all conciliation out of the question? Tortured by speculations like these, he kept nervously away from the others on board, and paced restlessly up and down near the bows; he saw nothing consciously then, but afterwards every detail of those terrible ten minutes came back to him vividly, down to the lights still hanging in the rigging of the vessels in harbour, and the hoarse cries of the men in a brown-sailed lugger gliding past them out to sea. Out by the bar there was a light haze, in the midst of which lay the long black hull of the 'Coromandel,' and to this the tender worked round in a tedious curve preparatory to lying alongside. As they passed under the stern Mark nerved himself to look amongst the few figures at the gangway for the face he feared—but Holroyd was not amongst them. After several unsuccessful attempts of a Lascar to catch the rope thrown from the tender, accompanied by some remarks in a foreign language on his part which *may* have been offered in polite excuse for his awkwardness, the rope was secured at length, the tender brought against the vessel's side, and the gangway lashed across. Then followed a short delay, during which the P. and O. captain, in rough-weather costume, conversed with the agent across the rails with a certain condescension.

'Thick as a hedge outside,' Mark heard him say; 'haven't



turned in all night. What are we all waiting for now? Here, quartermaster, just ask the doctor to step forward, will you?’

Somehow, at the mention of the doctor, Holroyd's allusions to his illness recurred to Mark's mind, and hopes he dared not confess even to himself, so base and vile were they, rose in his heart.

‘Here's the doctor; clean bill of health, eh, doctor?’ asked the agent—and Mark held his breath for the answer.

‘All well on board.’

‘Tumble in, then;’ and there was an instant rush across the gangway. Mark followed some of the crowd down into the saloon, where the steward was laying breakfast, but he could not see Holroyd there either, and for a few minutes was pent up in a corner in the general bustle which prevailed. There were glad greetings going on all around him, confused questions and answers, rapid directions to which no one had time to attend, and now and then an angry exclamation over the eagerly read letters: ‘And where's mother living now?’ ‘We've lost that 7.40 express all through that infernal tender!’ ‘Look here, don't take that bag up on deck to get wet, d'ye hear?’ ‘Jolly to be back in the old place again, eh?’ ‘I wish I'd never left it—that d—d scoundrel has gone and thrown all those six houses into Chancery!’ and so on, those of the passengers who were not talking or reading being engaged in filling up the telegraph forms brought on board for their convenience. Mark extricated himself from the hubbub as soon as he could, and got hold of the steward. There was a gentleman on board of the name of Holroyd; he seemed well enough, as far as the steward knew, though a bit poorly when he first came aboard, to be sure; he was in his berth just then getting his things together to go ashore, but he'd be up on deck directly. Half sick and half glad at this additional delay, Mark left the saloon and lingered listlessly about above, watching the Lascars hauling up baggage from the hold—they would have been interesting enough to him at any other time, with their seamed bilious complexions of every degree of swarthinness, set off by the touches of colour in their sashes and head coverings, their strange cries and still more uncouth jocularity—but he soon tired of them then, and wandered aft, where the steamer-chairs, their usefulness at an end for that voyage, were huddled together dripping and forlorn on the damp red deck. He was still standing by them, idly turning over the labels attached to their backs, and reading the names thereon without the slightest

real curiosity, when he heard a well-remembered voice behind him crying, 'Mark, my dear old fellow, so you've come after all! I was half afraid you wouldn't think it worth your while. I can't



tell you how glad I am to see you!' And he turned with a guilty start to face the man he had wronged.

'Evidently,' thought Mark, 'he knows nothing yet, or he wouldn't meet me like this!' and he gripped the cordial hand held out to him with convulsive force; his face was white and his lips trembled, he could not speak.

Such unexpected emotion on his part touched and gratified Holroyd, who patted him on the shoulder affectionately. 'It's all right, old boy, I understand,' he said; 'so you *did* think I was gone after all? Well, this is a greater pleasure to me than ever it can be to you.'

'I never expected to see you again,' said Mark as soon as he could speak; 'even now I can hardly believe it.'

'I'm quite real, however,' said Holroyd, laughing; 'there's more of me now than when they carried me on board from Colombo; don't look so alarmed—the voyage has brought me round again, I'm my old self again.'

As a matter of fact there was a great change in him; his bearded face, still burnt by the Ceylon sun, was lined and wasted, his expression had lost its old dreaminess, and, when he did not smile, was sterner and more set than it had been; his manner, as Mark noticed later, had a new firmness and decision; he looked a man who could be mercilessly severe in a just cause, and even his evident affection was powerless to reassure Mark.

The hatches had by this time been closed over the hold again and the crane unshipped, the warning bell was ringing for the departure of the tender, though the passengers still lingered till the last minute, as if a little reluctant, after all, to desert the good ship that had been their whole world of late; the reigning beauty of the voyage, who was to remain with the vessel until her arrival at Gravesend, was receiving her last compliments during prolonged and complicated leave-takings, in which, however, the exhilaration of most of her courtiers—now that their leave or furlough was really about to begin—was too irrepressible for sentiment. A last delay at the gangway, where the captain and ship's officers were being overwhelmed with thanks and friendly good-byes, and then the deck was cleared at last, the gangway taken in and the rail refastened, and, as the tender steamed off, all the jokes and allusions which formed the accumulated wit of the voyage flashed out with a brief and final brilliancy, until the hearty cheering given and returned drowned them for ever.

On the tender, such acquaintances as Holroyd had made during the voyage gave Mark no chance of private conversation with him, and even when they had landed and cleared the Custom House, Mark made no use of his opportunity; he knew he must speak soon, but he could not tell him just then, and accordingly put off the evil hour by affecting an intense interest in the minor

incidents of the voyage, and in Vincent's experiences of a planter's life. It was the same in the hotel coffee-room, where some of the 'Coromandel's' passengers were breakfasting near them, and the conversation became general; after breakfast, however, Mark proposed to spend some time in seeing the place, which he thought would lead the way to confession. But Holroyd would not hear of this; he seemed possessed by a feverish impatience to get to London without delay, and very soon they were pacing the Plymouth railway platform together, waiting for the up train, Mark oppressed by the gloomy conviction that if he did not speak soon, the favourable moment would pass away, never to return.

'Where do you think of going to first when you get in?' he asked, in dread of the answer.

'I don't know,' said Holroyd; 'the Great Western, I suppose—it's the nearest.'

'You mustn't go to an hotel,' said Mark; 'won't you come to my rooms? I don't live with my people any longer, you know, and I can easily put you up.' He was thinking that this arrangement would give him a little more time for his confession.

'Thanks,' said Holroyd gratefully; 'it's very kind of you to think of that, old fellow; I will come to you, then—but there is a house I must go to as soon as we get in; you won't mind if I run away for an hour or two, will you?'

Mark remembered what Caffyn had said. 'There will be plenty of time for that to-morrow, won't there?' he said nervously.

'No,' said Holroyd impatiently; 'I can't wait. I daren't. I have let so much time go by already—you will understand when I tell you all about it, Mark. I can't rest till I know whether there is still a chance of happiness left for me, or—or whether I have come too late and the dream is over.'

In that letter which had fallen into Caffyn's hands Holroyd had told Mabel the love he had concealed so long; he had begged her not to decide too hastily; he would wait any time for her answer, he said, if she did not feel able to give it at once; and in the meantime she should be troubled by no further importunities on his part. This was not, perhaps, the most judicious promise to make; he had given it from an impulse of consideration for her, being well aware that she had never looked upon him as a possible lover, and that his declaration would come upon her with a certain shock. Perhaps, too, he wanted to leave himself a margin of hope as long as possible to make his exile endurable;

since for months, if no answer came back to him, he could cheat himself with the thought that such silence was favourable in itself; but even when he came to regret his promise, he shrank from risking all by breaking it. Then came his long illness, and the discovery at Newera Ellia; for the first time he thought that there might be other explanations of the delay, and while he was writing the letter which had come to Mark, he resolved to make one more appeal to Mabel, since it might be that his first by some evil chance had failed to reach her. That second appeal, however, was never made. Before he could do more than begin it, the fever he had never wholly shaken off seized him again and laid him helpless, until, when he was able to write once more, he was already on his way to plead for himself. But the dread lest his own punctilious folly and timidity had closed the way to his heart's desire had grown deeper and deeper, and he felt an impulse now which was stronger than his natural reserve to speak of it to some one.

'Yes,' he continued, 'she may have thought I was drowned, as you did; perhaps she has never dreamed how much she is to me: if I could only hope to tell her that even now!'

'Do you mind telling me her name?' said Mark, with a deadly foreboding of what was coming.

'Did I never speak of the Langtons to you?' said Holroyd. 'I think I must have done so. She is a Miss Langton. Mabel, her name is' (he dwelt on the name with a lover's tenderness). 'Some day if—if it is all well, you may see her, I hope. Oddly enough, I believe she has heard your name rather often; she has a small brother who used to be in your form at St. Peter's; did I never tell you?'

'Never,' said Mark. He felt that fate was too hard for him; he had honestly meant to confess all up to that moment, he had thought to found his strongest plea for forbearance on his approaching marriage. How could he do that now? what mercy could he expect from a rival? He was lost if he was mad enough to arm Holroyd with such a weapon; he was lost in any case, for it was certain that the weapon would not lie hidden long; there were four days still before the wedding—time enough for the mine to explode! What could he do? how could he keep the other in the dark, or get rid of him, before he could do any harm? And then Caffyn's suggestions came back to him. Was it possible to make use of Caffyn's desire for a travelling companion, and turn it to his own purpose? If Caffyn was so anxious to have Holroyd with

him in the Lakes, why not let him? It was a desperate chance enough, but it was the only one left to him; if it failed, it would ruin him, but that would certainly happen if he let things take their course; if it succeeded, Mabel would at least be his. His resolution was taken in an instant, and carried out with a strategy that gave him a miserable surprise at finding himself so thorough a Judas. 'By the way,' he said, 'I've just thought of something. Harold Caffyn is a friend of mine. I know he wants to see you again, and he could tell you all you want to hear about—about the Langtons, I've heard *him* mention them often enough; you see you don't even know where they are yet. I'll wire and ask him to meet us at my rooms, shall I?'

'That's a capital idea!' cried Holroyd. 'Caffyn is sure to know; do it at once, like a good fellow.'

'You stay here then, and look out for the train,' said Mark, as he hurried to the telegraph office, leaving Holroyd thinking how thoughtful and considerate his once selfish friend had become. Mark sent the telegram, which ended, 'He knows nothing as yet. I leave him to you.'

When he returned he found that Holroyd had secured an empty compartment in the train which was preparing to start, and Mark got in with a heavy apprehension of the danger of a long journey alone with Holroyd. He tried to avoid conversation by sheltering himself behind a local journal, while at every stoppage he prayed that a stranger might come to his rescue. He read nothing until a paragraph, copied from a London literary paper, caught his eye. 'We understand,' the paragraph ran, 'that the new novel by the author of "Illusion," Mr. Cyril Ernstone (or rather Mr. Mark Ashburn, as he has now declared himself), will be published early in the present spring, and it is rumoured that the second work will show a marked advance on its predecessor.' It was merely the usual puff preliminary, though Mark took it as a prediction, and at any other time would have glowed with anticipated triumph. Now it only struck him with terror. Was it in Holroyd's paper too? Suppose he asked to look at Mark's, and saw it there, and questioned him, as of course he would! What should he say? Thinking to avoid this as far as possible, he crumpled up the tell-tale paper and hurled it out of window; but his act had precisely the opposite effect, for Holroyd took it as an indication that his companion was ready for conversation, and put down the paper he had been pretending to read.

'Mark,' he began with a slight hesitation, and with his first words Mark knew that the question was coming which he dreaded more than anything; he had no notion how he should reply to it, beyond a general impression that he would have to lie, and lie hard.

'Mark,' said Holroyd again, 'I didn't like to worry you about it before, I thought perhaps you would speak of it first; but—but have you never heard anything more of that ambitious attempt of mine at a novel? You needn't mind telling me.'

'I—I *can't* tell you,' Mark said, looking away out of window.

'I don't expect anything good,' said Holroyd; 'I never thought—why should I be such a humbug! I *did* think sometimes—more lately perhaps—that it wouldn't be an utter failure. I see I was wrong. Well, if I was ambitious, it was rather for her than myself; and if she cares for me, what else matters to either of us? Tell me all about it.'

'You—you remember what happened to the first volume of the "French Revolution"? ' began Mark.

'Go on,' said Holroyd.

'It—the book—*yours*, I mean,' said Mark (he could not remember the original title), 'was burnt.'

'Where? at the office? Did they write and tell you so? had they read it?'

Mark felt he was among pitfalls.

'Not at the office,' he said; 'at my rooms—my old rooms.'

'It came back, then?'

'Yes, it came back. There—there was no letter with it; the girl at the lodgings found the manuscript lying about. She—she burnt it.'

The lies sprang in ready succession from his brain at the critical moment, without any other preparation than the emergency—as lies did with Mark Ashburn; till lately he had hoped that the truth might come, and he loathed himself now for this fresh piece of treachery, but it had saved him for the present, and he could not abandon it.

'I thought it would at least have been safe with you,' said Holroyd, 'if you—no, my dear fellow, I didn't mean to reproach you. I can see how cut up you are about it; and, after all, it—it was only a rejected manuscript—the girl only hastened its course a little. Carlyle re-wrote his work; but then I'm not Carlyle. We won't say any more about it, eh, old fellow? it's only one dream over.'



Mark was seized with a remorse which almost drove him to confess all and take the consequences ; but Holroyd had sunk back to his position by the window again, and there was a fixed frown on his face which, although it only arose from painful thought, effectually deterred Mark from speaking. He felt now that everything depended on Caffyn. He sat looking furtively at the other now and then, and thinking what terrible reproaches those firm lips might utter ; how differently the sad, kind eyes might regard him before very long, and once more he longed for a railroad crash which would set him free from his tangled life. The journey ended at last, and they drove to South Audley Street. Vincent was very silent ; in spite of his philosophical bearing, he felt the blow deeply. He had come back with ideas of a possible literary career before him, and it was hard to resign them all at once. It was rather late in the afternoon when they arrived, and Caffyn was there to receive them ; he was delighted to welcome Holroyd, and his cordiality restored the other to cheerfulness ; it is so pleasant to find that one is not forgotten—and so rare. When Vincent had gone upstairs to see his sleeping-room, Caffyn turned to Mark : there was a kind of grin on his face, and yet a certain admiration too.

‘I got your telegram,’ he said. ‘So—so you’ve brought yourself to part with him after all?’

‘I thought over what you said,’ returned Mark, ‘and—and he told me something which would make it very awkward and—and painful for him, and for myself too, if he remained.’

‘You haven’t told him anything, then, still?’

‘Nothing,’ said Mark.

‘Then,’ said Caffyn, ‘I think I shall not be alone at Wastwater after all, if you’ll only let me manage.’

Was Mark at all surprised at the languid Harold Caffyn exerting himself in this way? If he was, he was too grateful for the phenomenon to care very much about seeking to explain it. Caffyn was a friend of his, he had divined that Holroyd’s return was inconvenient : very likely he had known of Vincent’s hopeless attachment for Mabel, and he was plainly anxious to get a companion at the Lakes ; any one of these was motive enough. Soon after Holroyd joined them in the sitting-room. Caffyn, after more warm congratulations and eager questioning, broached the Wastwater scheme. ‘You may as well,’ he concluded, ‘London’s beastly at this time of year. You’re looking as if the voyage

hadn't done you much good, too, and it will be grand on the mountains just now; come with me by the early train to-morrow, you've no packing to do. I'm sure we shall pull together all right.'

'I'm sure of that,' said Vincent; 'and if I had nothing to keep me in town—but I've not seen the Langtons yet, you know. And, by-the-bye, you can tell me where I shall find them now. I suppose they have not moved?'

'Now I've got you!' laughed Caffyn: 'if the Langtons are the only obstacle, you can't go and see them, for the very good reason that they're away—abroad somewhere!'

'Are they all there?'

'Every one of 'em; even the father, I fancy, just now.'

'Do you know when they're likely to be back?'

'Haven't heard,' said Caffyn calmly; 'they must come back soon, you see, for the lovely Mabel's wedding.'

Mark held his breath as he listened; what was Caffyn going to say next? Vincent's face altered suddenly.

'Then Mabel—Miss Langton, is going to be married?' he asked in a curiously quiet tone.

'Rather,' said Caffyn; 'brilliant match in its way, I understand. Not much money on his side, but one of the coming literary fellows, and all that kind of thing, you know; just the man for that sort of girl. Didn't you know about it?'

'No,' said Holroyd uneasily; he was standing with his elbow on the mantelpiece, with his face turned from the other two; 'I didn't know—what is his name?'

'Upon my soul I forget—heard it somewhere.—Ashburn, you don't happen to know it, do you?'

'I!' cried Mark, shrinking; 'no, I—I haven't heard.'

'Well,' continued Caffyn, 'it isn't of much consequence, is it? I shall hit upon it soon, I dare say. They say she's deucedly fond of him, though. Can't fancy disdainful Miss Mabel condescending to be deucedly fond of any one—but so they tell me. And I say, Holroyd, to come back to the point, is there any reason why you should stay in town?'

'None,' said Holroyd, with pain ringing in his voice, 'none in the world why I should stay anywhere now.'

'Well, won't you come with me? I start the first thing to-morrow—it will do you good.'

'It's kind of you to ask,' said Vincent, 'but I can't desert Ashburn in that way after he took the trouble to come down and

meet me ; we've not seen one another for so long,—have we, Mark ?'

Caffyn smiled in spite of himself. 'Why, didn't he tell you ?' he said ; 'he's arranged to go abroad himself in a day or two.'

Vincent glanced round at Mark, who stood there the personification of embarrassment and shame. 'I see,' he said, with a change in his voice, 'I shall only be in the way here, then.' Mark said nothing—he could not. 'Well, Caffyn, I'll come with you ; the Lakes will do as well as any other place for the short time I shall be in England.'

'Then you haven't come home for good ?' inquired Caffyn.

'For good ? no—not exactly,' he replied bitterly ; 'plantation life has unsettled me, you see. I shall have to go back to it.'

'To Ceylon !' cried Mark, with hopes that had grown quite suddenly. Was it, could it be possible that the threatened storm was going to pass away—not for a time, but altogether ?

'Anywhere,' said Holroyd ; 'what does it matter ?'

'There's a man I know,' observed Caffyn, 'who's going out to a coffee estate somewhere in Southern India, the Annamalli Hills, I think it is ; he was wanting some one with a little experience to go out with him the other day. He's a rattling good fellow too—Gilroy, his name is. I don't know if you'd care to meet him. You might think it good enough to join him, at all events for a trial.'

'Yes,' said Holroyd listlessly, 'I may as well see him.'

'Well,' said Caffyn, 'he's at Liverpool just now, I believe. I can write to him and tell him about you, and ask him to come over and meet us somewhere, and then you could settle all about it, you know, if you liked the look of him.'

'It's very good of you to take all this trouble,' said Vincent gratefully.

'Bosh !' said Caffyn, using that modern form for polite repudiation of gratitude—'no trouble at all ; looks rather as if I wanted to get rid of you, don't you know—Gilroy's going out so very soon.'

'Is he ?' said Vincent. He had no suspicions ; Mabel's engagement seemed only too probable, and he knew that he had never had any claim upon her ; but for all that, he had no intention of taking the fact entirely upon trust ; he would not leave England till he had seen her and learned from her own lips that he must give up hope for ever ; after that the sooner he went the better.

'You needn't go out with him unless you want to—you might

join him later there; but of course you wouldn't take anything for granted, nothing. Still, if you *did* care to go out at once, I suppose you've nothing in the way of preparations to hinder you, eh?

'No,' said Vincent; 'it would only be transferring my trunks from one ship to another; but I—I don't feel well enough to go out just yet.'

'Of course not,' said Caffyn; 'you must have a week or two of mountain air first, then you'll be ready to go anywhere; but I must have you at Westwater,' he added, with a laughing look of intelligence at Mark, whose soul rose against all this duplicity—and subsided again.

How wonderfully everything was working out! Unless some fatality interposed between then and the next morning, the man he dreaded would be safely buried in the wildest part of the Lake District—he might even go off to India again and never learn the wrong he had suffered! At all events, Mark was saved for a time. He was thankful, deeply thankful now that he had resisted that mad impulse to confession.

Vincent had dropped into an arm-chair with his back to the window, brooding over his shattered ambitions; all his proud self-confidence in his ability to win fame for the woman he loved was gone now; he felt that he had neither the strength nor the motive to try again. If—if this he had heard was true, he must be an exile, with lower aims and a blanker life than those he had once hoped for.

All at once Mark, as he stood at the window with Caffyn, stepped back with a look of helpless terror.

'What the deuce is it now?' said the other under his breath.

'Mark caught Caffyn's elbow with a fierce grip; a carriage had driven up; they could see it plainly still in the afternoon light, which had only just begun to fade.

'Do you see?' muttered Mark thickly. 'She's in it; she looked up—and saw *me*!'

Caffyn himself was evidently disturbed. 'Not, not Mabel?' he whispered. 'Worse! it's Dolly—and *she'll* come up. She'll see *him*!'

The two stood there staring blankly at each other, while Holroyd was still too absorbed to have the least suspicion that the future happiness or misery of himself and others was trembling just then in the balance.

(To be continued.)

### THE MILK IN THE COCO-NUT.

FOR many centuries the occult problem how to account for the milk in the coco-nut has awakened the profoundest interest alike of ingenious infancy and of maturer scientific age. Though it cannot be truthfully affirmed of it, as of the cosmogony or creation of the world, in the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' that it 'has puzzled the philosophers of all ages' (for Sanchoniathon was certainly ignorant of the very existence of that delicious juice, and Manetho doubtless went to his grave without ever having tasted it fresh from the nut under a tropical verandah), yet it may be safely asserted that for the last three hundred years the philosopher who has not at some time or other of his life meditated upon that abstruse question is unworthy of such an exalted name. The cosmogony and the milk in the coco-nut are, however, a great deal closer together in thought than Sanchoniathon or Manetho, or the rogue who quoted them so glibly, is ever at all likely, in his wildest moments, to have imagined.

The coco-nut, in fact, is a subject well deserving of the most sympathetic treatment at the gentle hands of grateful humanity. No other plant is useful to us in so many diverse and remarkable manners. It has been truly said of that friend of man, the domestic pig, that he is all good, from the end of his snout to the tip of his tail; but even the pig, though he furnishes us with so many necessities or luxuries—from tooth-brushes to sausages, from ham to lard, from pepsine wine to pork pies—does not nearly approach, in the multiplicity and variety of his virtues, the all-sufficing and world-supplying coco-nut. A Chinese proverb says that there are as many useful properties in the coco-nut palm as there are days in the year; and a Polynesian saying tells us that the man who plants a coco-nut plants meat and drink, hearth and home, vessels and clothing, for himself and his children after him. Like the great Mr. Whiteley, the invaluable palm-tree might modestly advertise itself as a universal provider. The solid part of the nut supplies food almost alone to thousands of people daily, and the milk serves them for drink, thus acting as an efficient filter to the water absorbed by the roots in the most polluted or malarious regions. If you tap the flower stalk you get a sweet juice, which can be boiled down

into the peculiar sugar called (in the charming dialect of commerce) jaggery; or it can be fermented into a very nasty spirit known as palm-wine, toddy, or arrack; or it can be mixed with bitter herbs and roots to make that delectable compound 'native beer.' If you squeeze the dry nut you get coco-nut oil, which is as good as lard for frying when fresh, and is 'an excellent substitute for butter at breakfast,' on tropical tables. Under the mysterious name of copra (which most of us have seen with awe described in the market reports as 'firm' or 'weak,' 'receding' or 'steady') it forms the main or only export of many Oceanic islands, and is largely imported into this realm of England, where the thicker portion is called stearine, and used for making sundry candles with fanciful names, while the clear oil is employed for burning in ordinary lamps. In the process of purification, it yields glycerine; and it enters largely into the manufacture of most better-class soaps. The fibre that surrounds the nut makes up the other mysterious article of commerce known as coir, which is twisted into stout ropes, or woven into coco-nut matting and ordinary doormats. Brushes and brooms are also made of it, and it is used, not always in the most honest fashion, in place of real horse-hair, in stuffing cushions. The shell, cut in half, supplies good cups, and is artistically carved by the Polynesians, Japanese, Hindoos, and other benighted heathen, who have not yet learnt the true methods of civilised machine-made shoddy manufacture. The leaves serve as excellent thatch; on the flat blades, prepared like papyrus, the most famous Buddhist manuscripts are written; the long mid-ribs or branches (strictly speaking, the leaf-stalks), answer admirably for rafters, posts, or fencing; the fibrous sheath at the base is a remarkable natural imitation of cloth, employed for strainers, wrappers, and native hats; while the trunk, or stem, passes in carpentry under the name of porcupine wood, and produces beautiful effects as a wonderfully coloured cabinet-maker's material. These are only a few selected instances out of the innumerable uses of the coco-nut palm.

Apart even from the manifold merits of the tree that bears it, the milk itself has many and great claims to our respect and esteem, as everybody who has ever drunk it in its native surroundings will enthusiastically admit. In England, to be sure, the white milk in the dry nuts is a very poor stuff, sickly, and strong-flavoured, and rather indigestible. But in the tropics, coco-nut milk, or, as we oftener call it there, coco-nut water, is a very

different and vastly superior sort of beverage. At eleven o'clock every morning, when you are hot and tired with the day's work, your black servant, clad from head to foot in his cool clean white linen suit, brings you in a tall soda glass full of a clear, light, crystal liquid, temptingly displayed against the yellow background of a chased Benares brass-work tray. The lump of ice bobs enticingly up and down in the centre of the tumbler, or clinks musically against the edge of the glass as he carries it along. You take the cool cup thankfully and swallow it down at one long draught; fresh as a May morning, pure as an English hillside spring, delicate as—well, as coco-nut water. None but itself can be its parallel. It is certainly the most delicious, dainty, transparent, crystal drink ever invented. How did it get there, and what is it for?

In the early green stage at which coco-nuts are generally picked for household use in the tropics the shell hasn't yet solidified into a hard stony coat, but still remains quite soft enough to be readily cut through with a sharp table knife—just like young walnuts picked for pickling. If you cut one across while it's in this unsophisticated state, it is easy enough to see the arrangement of the interior, and the part borne by the milk in the development and growth of the mature nut. The ordinary tropical way of opening coco-nuts for table, indeed, is by cutting off the top of the shell and rind in successive slices, at the end where the three pores are situated, until you reach the level of the water, which fills up the whole interior. The nutty part around the inside of the shell is then extremely soft and jelly-like, so that it can be readily eaten with a spoon: but as a matter of fact very few people ever do eat the flesh at all. After their first few months in the tropics, they lose the taste for this comparatively indigestible part, and confine themselves entirely (like patients at a German spa) to drinking the water. A young coco-nut is thus seen to consist, first of a green outer skin, then of a fibrous coat, which afterwards becomes the hair, and next of a harder shell which finally gets quite woody; while inside all comes the actual seed or unripe nut itself. The office of the coco-nut water is the deposition of the nutty part around the side of the shell; it is, so to speak, the mother liquid, from which the harder eatable portion is afterwards derived. This state is not uncommon in embryo seeds. In a very young pea, for example, the inside is quite watery, and only the outer skin is at all solid, as we have all observed when green peas first come into season. But the special peculiarity of



the coco-nut consists in the fact that this liquid condition of the interior continues even after the nut is ripe, and that is the really curious point about the milk in the coco-nut which does actually need accounting for.

In order to understand it one ought to examine a coco-nut in the act of budding, and to do this it is by no means necessary to visit the West Indies or the Pacific Islands; all you need to do is to ask a Covent Garden fruit salesman to get you a few 'growers.' On the voyage to England, a certain number of precocious coco-nuts, stimulated by the congenial warmth and damp of most shipholds, usually begin to sprout before their time; and these waste nuts are sold by the dealers at a low rate to East End children and inquiring botanists. An examination of a 'grower' very soon convinces one what is the use of the milk in the coco-nut.

It must be duly borne in mind, to begin with, that the prime end and object of the nut is not to be eaten raw by the ingenious monkey, or to be converted by lordly man into coco-nut biseuits, or coco-nut pudding, but simply and solely to reproduce the coco-nut palm in sufficient numbers to future generations. For this purpose the nut has slowly acquired by natural selection a number of protective defences against its numerous enemies, which serve to guard it admirably in the native state from almost all possible animal depredators. First of all, the actual nut or seed itself consists of a tiny embryo plant, placed just inside the softest of the three pores or pits at the end of the shell, and surrounded by a vast quantity of nutritious pulp, destined to feed and support it during its earliest unprotected days, if not otherwise diverted by man or monkey. But as whatever feeds a young plant will also feed an animal, and as many animals betray a felonious desire to appropriate to their own wicked ends the food-stuffs laid up by the palm for the use of its own seedling, the coco-nut has been compelled to inclose this particularly large and rich kernel in a very solid and defensive shell. And, once more, since the palm grows at a very great height from the ground—I have seen them up to ninety feet in favourable circumstances—this shell stands a very good chance of getting broken in tumbling to the earth, so that it has been necessary to surround it with a mass of soft and yielding fibrous material, which breaks its fall, and acts as a buffer to it when it comes in contact with the soil beneath. So many protections has the coco-nut gradually devised for itself by the

continuous survival of the best adapted among numberless and endless spontaneous variations of all its kind in past time.

Now, when the coco-nut has actually reached the ground at last, and proceeds to sprout in the spot where chance (perhaps in the bodily shape of a disappointed monkey) has chosen to cast it, these numerous safeguards and solid envelopes naturally begin to prove decided nuisances to the embryo within. It starts under the great disadvantage of being hermetically sealed within a solid wooden shell, so that no water can possibly get at it to aid it as most other seeds are aided in the process of germination. Fancy yourself a seed-pea, anxious to sprout, but coated all round with a hard covering of impermeable sealing-wax, and you will be in a position faintly to appreciate the unfortunate predicament of a grower coco-nut. Natural selection, however,—that *deus ex machina* of modern science, which can perform such endless wonders, if only you give it time enough to work in and variations enough to work upon—natural selection has come to the rescue of the unhappy plant by leaving it a little hole at the top of the shell, out of which it can push its feathery green head without difficulty. Everybody knows that if you look at the sharp end of a coco-nut you will see three little brown pits or depressions on its surface. Most people also know that two of these are firmly stopped up (for a reason to which I shall presently recur), but that the third one is only closed by a slight film or very thin shell, which can be easily bored through with a pocket-knife, so as to let the milk run off before cracking the shell. So much we have all learnt during our ardent pursuit of natural knowledge on half-holidays in early life. But we probably then failed to observe that just opposite this soft hole lies a small roundish knob, embedded in the pulp or eatable portion, which knob is in fact the embryo palm or seedling, for whose ultimate benefit the whole arrangement (in brown and green) has been invented. That is very much the way with man: he notices what concerns his own appetite, and omits all the really important parts of the whole subject. We think the use of the hole is to let out the milk; but the nut knows that its real object is to let out the seedling. The knob grows out at last into the young plantlet, and it is by means of the soft hole that it makes its escape through the shell to the air and the sunshine which it seeks without.

This brings us really down at last to the true *raison d'être* for the milk in the coco-nut. As the seed or kernel cannot easily get

at much water from outside, it has a good supply of water laid up for it ready beforehand within its own encircling shell. The mother liquid from which the pulp or nutty part has been deposited remains in the centre, as the milk, till the tiny embryo begins to sprout. As soon as it does so, the little knob which was at first so very small enlarges rapidly and absorbs the water, till it grows out into a big spongy cellular mass, which at last almost fills up the entire shell. At the same time, its other end pushes its way out through the soft hole, and then gives birth to a growing bud at the top—the future stem and leaves—and to a number of long threads beneath—the future roots. Meanwhile, the spongy mass inside begins gradually to absorb all the nutty part, using up its oils and starches for the purpose of feeding the young plant above, until it is of an age to expand its leaves to the open tropical sunlight and shift for itself in the struggle for life. It seems at first sight very hard to understand how any tissue so solid as the pulp of coco-nut can be thus softened and absorbed without any visible cause; but in the subtle chemistry of living vegetation such a transformation is comparatively simple and easy to perform. Nature sometimes works much greater miracles than this in the same way: for example, what is called vegetable ivory, a substance so solid that it can be carved or turned only with great difficulty, is really the kernel of another palm-nut, allied to the coco-palm, and its very stony particles are all similarly absorbed during germination by the dissolving power of the young seedling.

Why, however, has the coco-nut three pores at the top instead of one, and why are two out of the three so carefully and firmly sealed up? The explanation of this strange peculiarity is only to be found in the ancestral history of the coco-nut kind. Most nuts, indeed, start in their earlier stage as if they meant to produce two or more seeds each; but as they ripen, all the seeds except one become abortive. The almond, for example, has in the flower two seeds or kernels to each nut; but in the ripe state there is generally only one, though occasionally we find an almond with two—a philipœna, as we commonly call it—just to keep in memory the original arrangement of its earlier ancestors. The reason for this is that plants whose fruits have no special protection for their seeds are obliged to produce a great many of them at once, in order that one seed in a thousand may finally survive the onslaughts of their Argus-eyed enemies; but when they learn to

protect themselves by hard coverings from birds and beasts, they can dispense with some of these supernumerary seeds, and put more nutriment into each one of those that they still retain. Compare, for example, the innumerable small round seedlets of the poppy-head with the solitary large and richly stored seed of the walnut, or the tiny black specks of mustard and cress with the single compact and well-filled seed of the filbert and the acorn. To the very end, however, most nuts begin in the flower as if they meant to produce a whole capsuleful of small unstored and unprotected seeds, like their original ancestors; it is only at the last moment that they recollect themselves, suppress all their ovules except one, and store that one with all the best and oiliest food-stuffs at their disposal. The nuts, in fact, have learned by long experience that it is better to be the only son and heir of a wealthy house, set up in life with a good capital to begin upon, than to be one of a poor family of thirteen needy and unprovided children.

Now, the coco-nuts are descended from a great tribe—the palms and lilies—which have as their main distinguishing peculiarity the arrangement of parts in their flowers, and fruits by threes each. For example, in the most typical flowers of this great group, there are three green outer calyx-pieces, three bright-coloured petals, three long outer stamens, three short inner stamens, three valves to the capsule, and three seeds or three rows of seeds in each fruit. Many palms still keep pretty well to this primitive arrangement, but a few of them which have specially protected or highly developed fruits or nuts have lost in their later stages the threefold disposition in the fruit, and possess only one seed, often a very large one. There is no better and more typical nut in the whole world than a coco-nut—that is to say, from our present point of view at least, though the fear of that awful person, the botanical Smelfungus, compels me to add that this is not quite technically true. Smelfungus, indeed, would insist upon it that the coco-nut is not a nut at all, and would thrill us with the delightful information, innocently conveyed in that delicious dialect of which he is so great a master, that it is really ‘a drupaceous fruit with a fibrous mesocarp.’ Still, in spite of Smelfungus with his nice hair-splitting distinctions, it remains true that humanity at large will still call a nut a nut, and that the coco-nut is the highest known development of the peculiar nutty tactics. It has the largest and most richly-stored seed of any known plant; and this seed is surrounded by one of the

hardest and most unmanageable of any known shells. Hence the coco-nut has readily been able to dispense with the three kernels which each nut used in its earlier and less developed days to produce. But though the palm has thus taken to reducing the number of its seeds in each fruit to the lowest possible point consistent with its continued existence at all, it still goes on retaining many signs of its ancient threefold arrangement. The ancestral and most deeply ingrained habits persist in the earlier stages; it is only in the mature form that the later acquired habits begin fully to predominate. Even so our own boys pass through an essentially savage childhood of ogres and fairies, bows and arrows, sugar-plums and barbaric nursery tales, as well as a romantic boyhood of mediæval chivalry and adventure, before they steady down into that crowning glory of our race, the solid, sober, matter-of-fact, commercial British Philistine. Hence the coco-nut in its unstripped state is roughly triangular in form, its angles answering to the separate three fruits of simpler palms; and it has three pits or weak places in the shell, through which the embryos of the three original kernels used to force their way out. But as only one of them is now needed, that one alone is left soft; the other two, which would be merely a source of weakness to the plant if unprotected, are covered in the existing nut by harder shell. Doubtless they serve in part to deceive the too inquisitive monkey or other enemy, who probably concludes that if one of the pits is hard and impermeable, the other two are so likewise.

Though I have now, I hope, satisfactorily accounted for the milk in the coco-nut, and incidentally for some other matters in its economy as well, I am loth to leave the young seedling whom I have brought so far on his way, to the tender mercies of the winds and storms and tropical animals, some of whom are extremely fond of his juicy and delicate shoots. Indeed, the growing point or bud of most palms is a very pleasant succulent vegetable, and one kind—the West Indian mountain cabbage—deserves a better and more justly descriptive name, for it is really much more like seakale or asparagus. I shall try to follow our young seedling on in life, therefore, so as to give, while I am about it, a fairly comprehensive and complete biography of a single flourishing coco-nut palm.

Beginning, then, with the fall of the nut from the parent-tree, the troubles of the future palm confront it at once in the shape of the nut-eating crab. This evil-disposed crustacean is common

around the sea-coast of the eastern tropical islands, which is also the region mainly affected by the coco-nut palm; for coco-nuts are essentially shore-loving trees, and thrive best in the immediate neighbourhood of the sea. Among the fallen nuts, the clumsy-looking thief of a crab (his appropriate Latin name is *Birgus latro*) makes great and dreaded havoc. To assist him in his unlawful object he has developed a pair of front legs, with specially strong and heavy claws, supplemented by a last or tail-end pair armed only with very narrow and slender pincers. He subsists entirely upon a coco-nut diet. Setting to work upon a big fallen nut—with the husk on, coco-nuts measure in the raw state about twelve inches the long way—he tears off all the coarse fibre bit by bit, and gets down at last to the hard shell. Then he hammers away with his heavy claw on the softest eye-hole till he has pounded an opening right through it. This done he twists round his body so as to turn his back upon the coco-nut he is operating upon (crabs are never famous either for good manners or gracefulness) and proceeds awkwardly but effectually to extract all the white kernel or pulp through the breach with his narrow pair of hind pincers. Like man, too, the robber-crab knows the value of the outer husk as well as of the eatable nut itself, for he collects the fibre in surprising quantities to line his burrow and lies upon it, the clumsy sybarite, for a luxurious couch. Alas, however, for the helplessness of crabs and the rapacity and cunning of all-appropriating man! The spoil-sport Malay digs up the nest for the sake of the fibre it contains, which spares him the trouble of picking junk on his own account, and then he eats the industrious crab who has laid it all up, while he melts down the great lump of fat under the robber's capacious tail, and sometimes gets from it as much as a good quart of what may be practically considered as limpid coco-nut oil. *Sic vos non vobis* is certainly the melancholy refrain of all natural history. The coco-nut palm intends the oil for the nourishment of its own seedling; the crab feloniously appropriates it and stores it up under his capacious tail for future personal use; the Malay steals it again from the thief for his own purposes; and ten to one the Dutch or English merchant beguiles it from him with sized calico or poisoned rum, and transmits it to Europe, where it serves to lighten our nights and assist at our matutinal tub, to point a moral and adorn the present tale.

If, however, our coco-nut is lucky enough to escape the robber-crabs, the pigs, and the monkeys, as well as to avoid falling into

the hands of man, and being converted into the copra of commerce, or sold from a costermonger's barrow in the chilly streets of ungenial London at a penny a slice, it may very probably succeed in germinating after the fashion I have already described, and pushing up its head through the surrounding foliage to the sunlight above. As a rule, the coco-nut has been dropped by its mother tree on the sandy soil of a sea-beach; and this is the spot it best loves, and where it grows to the stateliest height. Sometimes, however, it falls into the sea itself, and then the loose husk buoys it up, so that it floats away bravely till it is cast by the waves upon some distant coral reef or desert island. It is this power of floating and surviving a long voyage that has dispersed the coco-nut so widely among oceanic islands, where so few plants are generally to be found. Indeed, on many atolls or isolated reefs (for example, on Keeling Island) it is the only tree or shrub that grows in any quantity, and on it the pigs, the poultry, the ducks, and the land-crabs of the place entirely subsist. In any case, wherever it happens to strike, the young coco-nut sends up at first a fine rosette of big spreading leaves, not raised as afterwards on a tall stem, but springing direct from the ground in a wide circle, something like a very big and graceful fern. In this early stage nothing can be more beautiful or more essentially tropical in appearance than a plantation of young coco-nuts. Their long feathery leaves spreading out in great clumps from the buried stock, and waving with lithe motion before the strong sea-breeze of the Indies, are the very embodiment of those deceptive ideal tropics which, alas, are to be found in actual reality nowhere on earth save in the artificial palm houses at Kew, and the Casino Gardens at too entrancing Monte Carlo.

For the first two or three years the young palms must be well watered, and the soil around them opened; after which the tall graceful stem begins to rise rapidly into the open air. In this condition it may be literally said to make the tropics—those fallacious tropics, I mean, of painters and poets, of Enoch Arden and of Locksley Hall. You may observe that whenever an artist wants to make a tropical picture, he puts a group of coco-nut palms in the foreground, as much as to say, 'You see there's no deception; these are the genuine unadulterated tropics.' But as to painting the tropics without the palms, he might just as well think of painting the desert without the camels. At eight or ten years old the tree flowers, bearing blossoms of the ordinary palm type,



degraded likenesses of the lilies and yuccas, greenish and inconspicuous, but visited by insects for the sake of their pollen. The flower, however, is fertilised by the wind, which carries the pollen grains from one bunch of blossoms to another. Then the nuts gradually swell out to an enormous size, and ripen very slowly, even under the brilliant tropical sun. (I will admit that the tropics are hot, though in other respects I hold them to be arrant impostors, like that precocious American youth who announced on his tenth birthday that in his opinion life wasn't all that it was cracked up to be.) But the worst thing about the coco-nut palm, the missionaries always say, is the fatal fact that when once fairly started, it goes on bearing fruit uninterruptedly for forty years. This is very immoral and wrong of the ill-conditioned tree, because it encourages the idyllic Polynesian to lie under the palms all day long, cooling his limbs in the sea occasionally, sporting with Amaryllis in the shade, or with the tangles of Neæra's hair, and waiting for the nuts to drop down in due time, when he ought (according to European notions) to be killing himself with hard work under a blazing sky, raising cotton, sugar, indigo, and coffee, for the immediate benefit of the white merchant, and the ultimate advantage of the British public. It doesn't enforce habits of steady industry and perseverance, the good missionaries say; it doesn't induce the native to feel that burning desire for Manchester piece-goods and the other blessings of civilisation which ought properly to accompany the propagation of the missionary in foreign parts. You stick your nut in the sand; you sit by a few years and watch it growing; you pick up the ripe fruits as they fall from the tree; and you sell them at last for illimitable red cloth to the Manchester piece-goods merchant. Nothing could be more simple or more satisfactory. And yet it is difficult to see the precise moral distinction between the owner of a coco-nut grove in the South Sea Islands and the owner of a coal-mine or a big estate in commercial England. Each lounges decorously through life after his own fashion; only the one lounges in a Russia leather chair at a club in Pall Mall, while the other lounges in a nice soft dust-heap beside a rolling surf in Tahiti or the Hawaiian archipelago.

Curiously enough, at a little distance from the sandy levels or alluvial flats of the sea-shore, the sea-loving coco-nut will not bring its nuts to perfection. It will grow, indeed, but it will not thrive or fruit in due season. On the coast-line of Southern India, immense groves of coco-nuts fringe the shore for miles

and miles together; and in some parts, as in Travancore, they form the chief agricultural staple of the whole country. 'The State has hence facetiously been called Coconutcore,' says its historian; which charmingly illustrates the true Anglo-Indian notion of what constitutes facetiousness, and ought to strike the last nail into the coffin of a competitive examination system. A good tree in full bearing should produce 120 coco-nuts in a season; so that a very small grove is quite sufficient to maintain a respectable family in decency and comfort. Ah, what a mistake the English climate made when it left off its primitive warmth of the tertiary period, and got chilled by the ice and snow of the Glacial epoch down to its present misty and dreary wheat-growing condition. If it were not for that, those odious habits of steady industry and perseverance might never have been developed in ourselves at all, and we might be lazily picking copra off our own coco-palms, to this day, to export in return for the piece-goods of some Arctic Manchester situated somewhere about the north of Spitzbergen or the New Siberian Islands.

Even as things stand at the present day, however, it is wonderful how much use we modern Englishmen now make in our own houses of this far Eastern nut, whose very name still bears upon its face the impress of its originally savage origin. From morning to night we never leave off being indebted to it. We wash with it as old brown Windsor or glycerine soap the moment we leave our beds. We walk across our passages on the mats made from its fibre. We sweep our rooms with its brushes, and wipe our feet on it as we enter our doors. As rope, it ties up our trunks and packages; in the hands of the housemaid it scrubs our floors; or else, woven into coarse cloth, it acts as a covering for bales and furniture sent by rail or steamboat. The confectioner undermines our digestion in early life with coco-nut candy; the cook tempts us later on with coco-nut cake; and Messrs. Huntley and Palmer cordially invite us to complete the ruin with coco-nut biscuits. We anoint our chapped hands with one of its preparations after washing; and grease the wheels of our carriages with another to make them run smoothly. Finally we use the oil to burn in our reading lamps, and light ourselves at last to bed with stearine candles. Altogether, an amateur census of a single small English cottage results in the startling discovery that it contains twenty-seven distinct articles which owe their origin in one way or another to the coco-nut palm. And yet we affect in our black ingratitude to despise the question of the milk in the coco-nut.

## 'THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD.'

## SUGGESTIONS FOR A CONCLUSION.

THIS article has been written from the point of view of a mere reader of this unfinished story, and the solution here suggested is based on *internal evidence only*. Indeed, the article itself is the result of the fascination the mystery had on the writer's mind, when he lately read it for the first time. He believes that this is the first attempt to solve the mystery that has contented itself simply and solely with the story as left by Charles Dickens, and the writer has merely endeavoured to do, in the form of a short article, what every reader of 'Edwin Drood' endeavours to do in his head, viz. to deduce a correct conclusion from somewhat incomplete premises.

An ordinary reader must come to the conclusion that John Jasper got rid of his nephew, Edwin Drood; and yet, if such be the case, the inevitable question arises, Where, then, is the mystery? The answer is, In the manner of the riddance. So forcibly does internal evidence point to this conclusion, that one feels suspicious of being entrapped into an enticing but nevertheless erroneous solution. However, the general impression left by the book is that Jasper is guilty, an impression formed from a touch here, an expression there, till the circumstantial evidence which in the story tells against Neville Landless is woven by the reader round Jasper. The question—what became of Edwin Drood?—will be answered anon; but, first, the appearances which point to Jasper as the murderer must be briefly sketched.

First of all, Jasper is found in an opium den. That a man should take opium thus is presumptive evidence that there is something in or about him different to other men: it is uncanny. But it may be objected, De Quincey took opium. True, but he did so privately, and even De Quincey, we fancy, would have foregone the pleasures—to say nothing of the pains—of opium, rather than enter an East-end den for their enjoyment. Nor did De

<sup>1</sup> The present number of our magazine was of necessity in print before the announcement of Mr. Luke Fildes' paper upon 'Edwin Drood'; our contributor, therefore, has had no opportunity of comparing his views with those of one who has had peculiar opportunities of information upon the subject.—ED. C.M.

Quincey smoke opium, but drank it; so that the cases are not exactly parallel.

Why does Jasper listen so attentively to the mutterings of his three companion smokers, the woman, Chinaman, and Lascar? and why does he say to each that one word 'Unintelligible'? This will be explained hereafter.

On the evening of that day Jasper and Edwin Drood, uncle and nephew, are together, and during their conversation the following dialogue ensues:—

*Jasper*—'You won't be warned, then?'

*Edwin*—'No, Jack.'

*Jasper*—'You can't be warned, then?'

*Edwin*—'No, Jack, not by you. Besides, I don't really consider myself in danger.'

Why should he? and why, having gone so far, could not Jasper confide in his nephew? He warns him against a danger without saying what the danger is. Is it a warning? Is it not a threat?

Mr. Jasper is scarcely the man to be fascinated by Mr. Sapsea's self-complacency, and his politeness to the future mayor has surely some object underlying it. Durdles, too, is a strange acquaintance to be so enthusiastically taken up, and Jasper seems strangely interested in his keys. There is something which prejudices a reader against Jasper, and when it is discovered from Rosa's conversation with Helena that he loves Rosa, we feel that his extraordinary affection for his nephew is rather at variance with what we should expect, seeing that there is so strong a reason for jealousy.

The quarrel between Edwin and Neville in the street is evidently overheard by Jasper, who, while pretending to be a peace-maker by inviting them to his hospitable gate-house, with truly diabolical skill turns the conversation anew on the betrothal, and the quarrel breaks out afresh. Not satisfied with an ordinary quarrel, Jasper aggravates it by drugging the wine, thereby causing Neville's passion to blaze out so furiously against Edwin. To make this result yet more certain, Jasper looks from one to the other in turn as they make irritating remarks, knowing well that the presence of a third person always aggravates a quarrel between two others.

Jasper takes advantage of the ill-feeling between the young men, so as to have at hand an acknowledged enemy to Edwin, should such be required, and in this spirit he makes the most of

the quarrel to Mr. Crisparkle that same night, and hastens next day to inform Mrs. Crisparkle as well. The latter action admits of two interpretations, a polite and a cunning. Mr. Crisparkle would have kept the affair secret from his mother, but Jasper was too quick for him. He wished every one round him to know of Neville's animosity against Edwin, aware how greatly prejudice governs opinion, whether it be public or private.

Had Rosa's interview with Mr. Grewgious been only a trifle more confidential on Rosa's part, the whole course of events might have been altered. But, as it was, Mr. Grewgious had no suspicion of any disagreement between the betrothed, and consequently assured the white-lipped and anxious Jasper that Rosa had hinted no wish to be released from Edwin. They separate with the full understanding that the marriage will take place. Is there any difference between the 'God bless them both!' of Mr. Grewgious and the 'God save them both!' of Mr. Jasper? We fear so.

Perhaps the strongest hint in the book as to the murderer is the passage describing Mr. Crisparkle finding Jasper asleep on a couch, when he called at the gate-house one evening, viz.: 'Long afterwards he had cause to remember how Jasper sprang from the couch in a delirious state between sleeping and waking, and crying out: "What is the matter? Who did it?"' The proposal that he shall make peace between Edwin and Neville perplexes Jasper at first, for it is what he scarcely desires; but he seems to consider that their meeting at his house may be to his own advantage, and agrees to it. He explains his brief perplexity by showing some entries in his diary—made on the night of the quarrel—which express his fear of Neville's resentment against Edwin in the strongest language, and Mr. Crisparkle is satisfied.

The ring, that was to have been Rosa's engagement-ring, is a rose of diamonds and rubies delicately set in gold, and is contained in an ordinary ring-case made for a single ring. This Mr. Grewgious delivers to Edwin, charging him solemnly to bring it back to him if anything should be amiss between him and Rosa. It is plain that this ring is to be an important element in the story, especially when come these significant words, 'Let them' (the jewels in the ring) 'be. Let them lie unspoken of in his breast. However distinctly or indistinctly he entertained these thoughts, he arrived at the conclusion, Let them be. Among the mighty store of wonderful chains that are for ever forging, day and night,

in the vast iron-works of time and circumstance, there was one chain forged in the moment of that small conclusion, riveted to the foundations of heaven and earth, and gifted with invincible force to hold and drag.' The origin of this mysterious sentence is Edwin's act in putting the ring back in his breast, without mentioning it to Rosa, when they mutually break off the engagement between them. As they said 'Good-bye'—little knowing all it meant—they kissed each other fervently. To them it was a kiss that meant that thenceforth they were to be to one another as brother and sister only, but to the watchful Jasper's jealous eyes it seemed but a lovers' parting salutation, and from that moment Edwin Drood was doomed.

Just previous to this interview, Mr. Jasper has had 'a night with Durdles.' The first thing to be noticed in a notable chapter is that they pass a mound by the yard-gate, and that Durdles warns Jasper to beware of it, as it is quicklime, adding grimly, 'with a little handy stirring quick enough to eat your bones,' which naturally makes an impression on Jasper. Entering the Cathedral they go down into the crypt, of which Durdles has the key. Jasper has brought with him a bottle, whose contents, whatever they may be, prove at last too strong for Durdles, for after ascending the great tower and descending into the crypt again, he sinks down by one of the pillars and falls asleep at once. In his sleep he dreams that something touches him, and that something falls from his hands, and when he wakes he finds Jasper walking up and down, and sees the key of the crypt door lying at his side. It is two o'clock, so that Durdles has had a long sleep—so long that we are inclined to believe that Jasper has tried his trick of drugging again. As they finally emerge from the Cathedral, Deputy appears, with his fire of stones and impish chant, whereat Jasper's rage is unaccountable—except on the supposition that the expedition was not so unaccountable after all, and that a witness of it was what John Jasper least expected or desired.

On the eventful Christmas Eve, Edwin Drood and Neville Landless are to meet at the gate-house, and what each does during the day is of some importance, in consequence of after events. Neville burns his stray papers, prepares for a walking excursion, and buys a heavy stick: all which circumstances will be used against him afterwards. Edwin goes into the jeweller's shop to have his watch set, and the jeweller tells him of Jasper's remark, that he (Jasper) knew all the jewellery his nephew wore, viz.



watch, chain, and shirt-pin; a subject to be recurred to again. Edwin's subsequent conversation with the opium woman is, though he knows it not, a terrible warning. She tells him that Ned is a dangerous name, a threatened name, to which he lightly replies, 'The proverb says that threatened men live long.' 'Then Ned—so threatened is he—should live to all eternity,' retorts the woman, and Edwin resolves to mention it to Jack (who alone calls him Ned) to-morrow. Why not to-day; why not to-day?

Jasper spends the day to some purpose, making much of his affection for his nephew to the shopkeepers whom he deals with, and calling on Mr. Sapsea to mention his dinner party of three that night, and to insidiously prejudice him still further against Neville. Quite different is his method with Mr. Crisparkle. He assures him he has overcome his black humours and fears of Neville, and that he means to burn this year's diary at the year's end. After this, come what may, the Minor Canon cannot possibly suspect Jasper. To-day Jasper has been wearing a large black scarf of strong close-woven silk, and before entering his gate-house he pulls it off and hangs it in a loop on his arm. 'For that brief time, his face is knitted and stern. But it immediately clears as he resumes his singing and his way.' And the three meet.

There is a great storm that night, and next morning Edwin Drood has disappeared. Neville has started on his walking tour, but being suspected is brought back. His story is simply that he and Edwin went down to the river at about twelve o'clock to watch the storm, that they stayed for about ten minutes, and that Edwin finally left him at Mr. Crisparkle's door, saying he was going straight back to the gate-house. However, Jasper's deference to Mr. Sapsea now meets with its reward, for the mayor by his conduct certainly prejudices opinion against Neville, and unconsciously assists Jasper's plans.

But when Mr. Grewgious coldly and dispassionately informs Jasper that Edwin and Rosa's engagement was broken off before that terrible Christmas Eve, and that Edwin had forborne to tell him of it out of consideration for his uncle's feelings, Mr. Jasper breaks utterly down. To have committed murder is terrible enough to a murderer's mind, but to learn that the murder was utterly objectless and fruitless—to learn it suddenly and without a moment's warning—is one of those stunning surprises which even the strongest nature cannot endure, and hence it is that Jasper swoons away at Mr. Grewgious' news.



But a man of resource like Jasper soon recovers his wits, and, after telling Mr. Grewgious and Mr. Crisparkle (who has joined them) that no quarrel took place between Edwin and Neville in his house that night, he starts the theory that Edwin may have gone away to spare himself the pain of awkward explanations, fitting this theory in cleverly with what Mr. Grewgious had just previously told him. That Neville loved Rosa is another piece of news to Jasper, which, though scarcely likely to improve the latter's feelings towards Neville, at once suggests a powerful motive for Edwin's destruction by his old enemy. Jasper still clings to his new theory, till, as he had foreseen, Edwin's watch, chain, and shirt-pin are found at the weir by Mr. Crisparkle, and everything points not to absconding but to murder. The jeweller's opinion that the watch had not been re-wound since Edwin's visit to his shop (it had certainly run down before being cast into the water) justified the hypothesis that it was taken from Edwin not long after he left Jasper's house at midnight with Neville, and had been thrown away after being retained some hours. Rosa's evidence, too, dismisses the theory of absconding, and Jasper shows Mr. Crisparkle an entry in his diary, which declares his conviction that Edwin was murdered—a conviction that we can hardly doubt.

Now comes the question, how did Jasper effect his awful purpose? After parting with Neville at Mr. Crisparkle's door, Edwin went straight back to the gate-house. Whether Jasper drugged him there under guise of hospitality (and we know him to be a proficient in the art), or by a sudden attack rendered all resistance impossible, matters little. He must have strangled him with that great black scarf, and then—how was he to dispose of the body? Referring to the night expedition with Durdles, it will be remembered that Durdles slept for a long time—probably not far short of two hours—in the crypt, and that he dropped the key of the crypt-door from his hand. Thus Jasper had ample time to leave the crypt in order to select a place for the interment of his future victim. The crypt itself was out of the question, because not only was Durdles then present, but it was notoriously one of the places in which he took a delight in making discoveries. Hence any tampering with the walls or pavement would be almost certainly detected. But where else?

On this expedition—as indeed always—Durdles carried his dinner bundle, and on a former occasion that bundle contained the key of Mrs. Sapsea's tomb. Presuming, as we fairly may, that it

contained this key that night, Jasper, having the bundle, had it in his power either to take a cast of the key or to substitute another for it, so as to see for himself if there were room in the tomb for another body. He had carefully scrutinised the key before: consequently nothing would be easier than to procure a similar one and to appropriate the real key, while substituting the false one in Durdles' bundle. Indeed, if the substituted key were not *precisely* similar to the real, it would not open the tomb, which would be all the more advantageous to Jasper.

Mention was also made of a mound of quicklime they passed by, and it is our opinion that either then (while Durdles slept), or on the night of the murder, Jasper procured some of this quicklime, and put it in Mrs. Sapsea's tomb, afterwards inserting the body of the hapless Edwin. The quicklime would speedily destroy the body, and long before the tomb was again opened—which would probably not be till Mr. Sapsea's death—all traces would have disappeared. Jasper had but to carry the body from the gate-house to the tomb, apparently no great distance; and any risk he ran of being seen was much diminished by the wildness of the night. Having finally disposed of his victim, he must have gone to the weir, and cleverly arranged the watch-chain so that it caught in the interstices of the timbers, while he flung the shirt-pin into the water, lest the discovery of all these articles at once might arouse suspicion from the fact of their clumsy exposure.

To rid himself of the corpse, to get to the weir (some two miles off), to arrange the jewellery, and to be safely back in his gate-house again without being seen, make up a night's work from which the boldest criminal might well shrink; but the fury of the storm favoured the murderer, and but for his collapse at Mr. Grewgious' news Jasper might never have been suspected. The scheme by which it falls to Mr. Crisparkle to find the watch, so that he becomes one of the chief witnesses against Neville, is an admirable stroke on Jasper's part, but it is more than counter-balanced by what Mr. Grewgious saw as he warmed his hands, 'a heap of torn and miry clothes upon the floor.'

Mr. Datchery we take to be a detective, employed by Mr. Grewgious to keep a watch on Jasper. Notice his look of interest when Deputy, pointing to part of the gate-house, says, 'That's Jarsper's;' also his excessive politeness to Mr. Sapsea, and remember that Jasper's politeness to the same person was not without

an object. His white hair, too, is unusually thick and ample, and he has black eyebrows, which is strange.

More than half a year has gone since Edwin's disappearance, and Jasper naturally considers himself safe, so safe indeed that, when he avows his love to Rosa, he tells her that had his affection for his nephew been one silken thread less strong he would have swept even him from his path. A faint suspicion of Jasper had before crossed Rosa's mind, and now recurs with redoubled force, but the only object for such a crime—to win her—seems altogether too slight to account for it; so she hides her suspicion. If Neville and his sister suspect him, they say nothing; Mr. Crisparkle is too open and frank to suspect anyone, and Mr. Grewgious acknowledges that he dislikes Jasper, but nothing more. How is the murderer to be brought to justice?

Old habits can seldom be relinquished altogether, and we cannot be much surprised at finding Jasper in the opium den once more. The vision he has, under the influence of opium, and the broken sentences extracted from him by the woman, speak for themselves. As he lies in stupor on the bed the woman exclaims, 'I heard ye say once, when I was lying where you're lying, and you were making your speculations on me, "Unintelligible!" I heard you say so, of two more than me. But don't be too sure always; don't ye be too sure, beauty!' From which we gather, that in the first scene of all, this woman had listened to his comment on herself and companions, and had from that time devoted herself to learn his secret. It explains, too, why she tracked him that Christmas Eve, when she unconsciously warned the generous Edwin of his danger, and explains her exclamation, now, when Jasper leaves her house, 'I'll not miss ye twice!'

She follows him to Cloisterham and falls in with Mr. Datchery, who extracts information from her that rather astonishes him. After bargaining with Deputy to find out where she lives in London, Mr. Datchery in the Cathedral next morning sees the woman's threatening gestures at Jasper, and afterwards hears from her own lips that she recognises him. He returns home for breakfast, opens his cupboard door, 'takes his bit of chalk from its shelf, adds one thick line to the score, extending from the top of the cupboard door to the bottom, and then falls to with an appetite.'

Here the unfinished story breaks off at an exciting moment, and it only remains to consider how Jasper's detection was brought about. Mr. Datchery doubtless confided all he had learnt to Mr.

Grewgious, and they probably prevailed on the opium woman to allow them, or one of them, to be present at Jasper's next visit, the time of which they could ascertain for themselves. Lieutenant Tartar, disguised as a sailor, might, in the most natural manner, be present at the same time in the den, and the woman's questions (suggested, maybe, by Mr. Datchery) to Jasper, when under the influence of opium, might extract valuable hints as to the manner of the crime, the bestowal of the body, &c., hints which a clever detective like Datchery might well piece together with the evidence obtainable from Deputy and Durdles. Deputy, be it remembered, saw Jasper and Durdles leaving the Cathedral on the night—or rather the morning—of their 'unaccountable expedition,' and could testify to Jasper's explosion of anger at his sudden appearance. Any account given by Durdles of what took place that night would be none too clear, but even he could not have forgotten dropping the key of the crypt-door, and the fact of Jasper having carried the bundle.

But what then? Supposing Jasper to have let fall a hint as to the burial of the body, the crypt would naturally be first thought of as a likely spot. Baffled there, for Durdles could soon tell if anything had been disturbed, attention would be drawn to the two keys carried by Durdles, and finally to that which had been in his dinner bundle, viz. the key of Mrs. Sapsea's tomb. But what could be discovered on opening it? Scarcely a body, for more than six months had elapsed since Edwin's disappearance. Scarcely even bones, for, if the hypothesis that quicklime was used be the correct one, no bones would remain. Indeed, what could remain? What could resist the destructive properties of quicklime?

The answer is—the stones of the ring given by Mr. Grewgious to Edwin, and never seen since. We know that Jasper (so the jeweller told Edwin) had a precise knowledge of Edwin's jewellery, and, exactly in accordance with that knowledge, Edwin's watch, chain, and shirt-pin were found at the weir. But Jasper could have had no knowledge of this ring, kept as it was in a case in Edwin's breast, unless, indeed, he examined his pockets after despatching him; which is unlikely, as plunder was by no means his object. It is almost certain, then, that the ring was buried on the body, and even if the action of the quicklime could destroy the case and the gold setting of the stones, it could not possibly affect the stones themselves, which were diamonds and rubies.

These, Mr. Grewgious could readily identify, and Bazzard could prove that the ring was delivered to Edwin. The ring, or the stones, once found and identified, the accumulated evidence of Mr. Grewgious, Mr. Datchery, Durdles, Deputy, Mr. Crisparkle, Rosa, and the opium woman, would, we think, assuredly convict Jasper of Edwin Drood's murder, while his conscience-stricken appearance at the prospect of detection, when the first breath of suspicion fastened on him, would at once popularly condemn him.

In conclusion, let us make a guess at the future of some of the other characters in the book. Mr. Tartar and Rosa would ere long be husband and wife, and we fancy Helena Landless would become Mrs. Crisparkle. Neville, cleared from all suspicion, would have to begin the world anew: Mr. Datchery and Durdles must remain as they are: we would not have them alter one whit. And Deputy? We can, perhaps, imagine (but faintly) his delight at 'Jasper's' downfall, and by using our eyes keenly may discern him indulging, as once before, 'in a slow and stately dance, perhaps supposed to be performed by the Dean,' to more fully express his ecstasy.



# *AT ECCLES.*

(SEPTEMBER 15, 1830.)

'To glory in a prophetic vision of knowledge covering the earth is an easier exercise of believing imagination than to see its beginning in newspaper placards staring at you from a bridge beyond the cornfields,' wrote George Eliot. No one living when Stephenson, ridiculed by nearly everyone, triumphantly floated his sugar-barrels on Chatmoss (where, supporting the railway, preserved by the peaty soil, they still remain) could have foreseen the changes to be worked in the country by the agency of railways. Those who regret the days before that period might do well to study a little of the discontent of those times:—'bread famines,' cholera, social disorder, class prejudices, leading to riots sometimes, and much bitterness always, were amongst the evils keenly felt by the half-starved handloom weavers of Eccles during the twelve preceding years. Now it is a town of 100,000 inhabitants; then it contained only 25,000, in 'six townships.' In 1819 the 'new vicar' had married and brought his wife (Emma Ann Hesketh, born 1795) to Eccles, where she worked amongst the people for seventeen years. Dean Stanley's mother, in a letter written January 17, 1832, thus speaks of her:—'There is one person who interests me very much, Mrs. Tom Blackburne, the Vicarress of Eccles, who received poor Mr. Huskisson, and immortalised herself by her activity, sense, and conduct throughout. . . . She has been the ruling spirit evidently, and, under her, her husband has become the very man for the place.' This may be imagined when, after doing his best to put an end to the disgraceful amusements of the place—bull-baiting, dog-fighting, and low sports—his popularity steadily increased among a people of whom (as may even appear in the course of this short paper) the ruling classes were very distrustful, and not without reason.

Eccles is on the line of railway between Manchester (four miles off) and Liverpool. The wretchedly-built vicarage stood in a garden, in front of which was a field through which 'the new road with iron rails' was to run. All the village was astonished to see 'smoke rapidly moving along the grass' one day in the summer of

1830. Being in a cutting nothing more was visible, nor when they had seen the engine was the wonder much lessened; and if educated people wondered less, they were more incredulous as to the results of the novelty. Nevertheless the line was finished, and the soldier-premier, the Duke of Wellington, was to represent His Majesty on the opening day of the first passenger railroad in England, September 15, 1830.

In celebration of this experiment, for even then most people only looked upon it as a doubtful thing, the houses of the adjacent parts of Lancashire were filled with guests. Mr. John Blackburne, M.P., asked his brother and sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Blackburne, to stay at Hale Hall, near Liverpool (which his ancestors in the direct line had possessed since 1199), and to go with his party to the ceremony and fêtes in honour of the day.

The invitation was accepted, and Mr. and Mrs. Blackburne went to Hale. Now, however, occurred one of those strange circumstances utterly condemned by critics of fiction as 'unreal,' 'unnatural,' or 'impossible;' only in this case it happened to be true, in spite of all these epithets. Mrs. Blackburne, rather strong-minded than otherwise, at all events one of the last women in the world to be affected by imagination, became possessed by an unmistakable presentiment, which made her feel quite sure *that her presence was required at home; and she went home at once.* There were difficulties in her way; every carriage was required, but she would go. She drove to Warrington, and from thence 'took boat' up the Irwell to Eccles. Canal boats were then regular conveyances, divided into first and second classes. There were no mobs or excitement anywhere on the 14th, and Mrs. Blackburne got quietly to Eccles without any adventures. When there, except that one of her children was unwell, she could find nothing wrong, or in the least likely to account for the presentiment which had driven her home in spite of all the, natural enough, ridicule of her husband and friends at Hale.

To go back was impossible; so she stayed with her children and arranged that they and their small friends should have a little feast in honour of the day. It was to happen otherwise.

Early on the morning of the 15th an incident occurred, the narration of which may throw some light on the temper of the times. Mr Barton, of Swinton, came in to say that a mob was expected to come from Oldham to attack the Duke of Wellington, then at the height of his unpopularity among the masses; for just



by Eccles three miles of the line was left unguarded. 'Could Mr. Blackburne say what was to be done?'

'My husband is away,' said the Vicarress, 'but I know that about fifty special constables were out last year, the very men for this work, if their licences have not expired.'

'Never mind licences,' replied Mr. Barton, with a superb indifference to form, quite natural under the circumstances. 'Where can I find the men?'

'Oh,' replied Mrs. Blackburne, 'I can get the men for you.'

Mr. Barton hesitated, but soon with gratitude accepted the offer, and with the help of the churchwardens and constables 'a guard for the Duke' was soon collected on the Bridge of Eccles, armed with staves and clubs, to be dispersed along the line.

This done, she had a tent put up for herself and the children, with whom were Lord Wilton's little daughters, the Ladies Elizabeth and Katherine Egerton, and their governess. The tent was just above the cutting and looked down on to it, and they would have a good view of the first train, expected to pass about eleven o'clock. The morning wore on, the crowds were increasing, and low murmurs of wonder were heard. It was thought that the experiment had failed. A few of the villagers came into the field, but none troubled the little band of watchers. The bright sunshine had passed away, and it had become dark, with large hot drops of rain, forerunners of a coming thunderstorm. The people lined the whole of the way from Manchester to Liverpool, and as far as the eye could reach faces were seen anxiously looking towards Liverpool. Suddenly a strange roar was heard from the crowd, not a cheer of triumph, but a prolonged wail, beginning at the farthest point and travelling along the swarming banks like the incoming swirl of a breaker as it runs up a gravelled beach.

Like a true woman, her first thought was for her husband, as Mrs. Blackburne heard the words repeated on all sides—'An accident!' 'The Vicarage!' She flew across the field to the gate and met a sad procession bringing in a sorely wounded yet quite conscious man. She saw in a moment that he had medals on his coat, and had been very tall, so that it could not be as she feared. The relief of that moment may be imagined. Then the quiet presence of mind, by practice habitual to her, and the ready flow of sympathy, left her no time to think of anything but the sufferer,

who said to her pathetically, 'I shall not plague you long.' She had not only the will but the power to help, even to supplying from her own medicine chest and stores, kept for the poor, everything that the surgeons required.

There was no time then to ask how it happened, but the particulars were as follow:—Four miles off, at Parkside, Mr. Huskisson, M.P. for Liverpool, and others, had got out when the engine stopped to take in water. Soon they heard that the 'Rocket' was coming. The extra large door of the Duke of Wellington's state car was swinging open over the passage between the lines. Mr. Huskisson, who would have been safe had he stood between the trains, stepped round—we suppose that few people had realised the speed at which any train travels on that first day—the engine knocked him down and the wheels passed over his thigh and leg.

In the horror of the moment Lord Wilton seems to have had more presence of mind than the rest. He suggested the removal of the sufferer to Eccles Vicarage, and improvised a tourniquet on the spot, while soon Dr. Brandreth, Mr. Ransome, and a Scotch surgeon who were in the train did what they could for him. The Duke of Wellington, Lords Granville, Salisbury, Colvil, &c., were in the state car, and Mrs. Huskisson had seen it all. She was with her husband till he was lifted out of the train, but in the Eccles cutting, being separated from his bearers by the excited and immense crowd, she lost sight of him. She was told he was to be taken to a farmhouse, Monkshall. She therefore went up the usual way on the other side where there were some steps, while he was carried through a sawyer's yard on the nearer side of the cutting, the crowd making way for and closing up after the bearers. Thus she did not arrive at the Vicarage for an hour after he was laid in the drawing-room, suffering agonies.

Contemporary accounts of any past events are so interesting to those of a future generation that we do not apologise for introducing a private letter into this narrative. Mr. Blackburne, as will be remembered, was not with his wife, and only the presentiment which had brought Mrs. Blackburne home had given the means of so readily and quickly obtaining surgical necessities and rest. One of the doctors advised amputation, but the others agreed that it would be needless cruelty; for it was before the days of chloroform.

Mr. Blackburne writes to his mother-in-law on the day after

the accident, partly repeating what has already been said, but adding some particulars which have never been printed.<sup>1</sup>

‘Eccles Vicarage, Tuesday, September 16, 1830.

‘. . . Poor Huskisson, you will have heard, is dead. He was killed yesterday. Particulars are as follows:—The Duke’s carriage was stopping to take in fresh water, when several of the other carriages were to pass by to see and be seen. Several of the gentlemen got out, and, among the rest, Huskisson. On a signal being given that another engine was coming they all got into the car again, when, horrid to relate, he slipt against the door and fell. The engine on the other railroad passed over his thigh and leg and smashed them to atoms, poor Mrs. H. looking on him. They immediately took him and brought him to this house, where he laid in excruciating agonies till nine last night, when he breathed his last. Fancy, my dearest Emma . . . seeing him brought up on a door! She made her way through the immense crowd. They placed him on the sofa in the drawing-room and dared not move him till he died. Lords Wilton, Granville, Colvil, and Mr. Wainwright, secretary to Mr. H., have been in ever since. To-day we have had Lords Gore, Warncliffe, Walhouse, and Littleton—with two deputations from Liverpool, so we are “in a tolerable bustle.” . . . I feel that they *are* pleased, and as to dearest Emma, they all value *her* as they *ought*.

‘To the last he retained his senses.’ Lord Granville says that when the dying man heard Wilton propose to take him to this house, he exclaimed: “Pray take me there; there I know is comfort; there I shall indeed be taken care of.”

‘But fancy my horror! *Not one word did I know of his being here till I had passed the place, and was literally eating my luncheon at Manchester!* In vain did I try to get a conveyance, till at last the Duke of Wellington sent to me and ordered his car to start, and I came with him back, he intending to come here; but the crowd was so *immense*, that the police dared not let him get out. To be sure, when my people on the Bridge saw me standing with him, they did shout—“That’s as it should be—Vicar for us!” He said, “These people seem to know you well.”

‘*Entre nous*, at the door I met my love, and after a good cry (I don’t know which was the greatest fool!) set to work. The

<sup>1</sup> The letter is of course written in the discursive manner of ordinary correspondence. It was not in the least carefully kept, but lost and only found by an accident many years later.

poor fellow was glad to see me, and never shall I forget the scene, his poor wife holding his head, and the great men weeping, for they all wept! He then received the Sacrament, added some codicils to his will, and seemed perfectly resigned. But his agonies were dreadful! Ransome says they must have been so. He expired at nine. We never left him till he breathed his last. Poor woman, how *she* lamented his loss; yet her struggles to bear with fortitude are wonderful. . . . I wish you could have heard him exclaim, after my petition, "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive. . ." "I have not the smallest ill-will to any one person in the whole world." They stay here till the Saturday, when they begin the sad journey to convey him to Sussex. They wanted to bury him at Liverpool, but she refused. I forgot to tell you that he told Lawrence before starting that he "*wished he were safe back.*" . . . You cannot conceive how kind the neighbours are. It is impossible to tell you how many trifling good-natured things have taken place. . . . *Horn sounding*' (for post to go out).

Mr. Huskisson was not buried at Chichester, for at last Mrs. Huskisson consented to the popular wish that his body might have a public funeral at Liverpool, where a statue of him by Gibson now stands in the cemetery. 'Poor Mrs. Huskisson,' writes Mrs. Stanley, 'was alternately in paroxysms of grief, and still more dreadful calmness, especially the day after, when it was wished to relieve her of all business, and she insisted on doing everything herself.' During the four days she was in the house none of the parishioners came near the Vicarage, though they were accustomed to take it as a matter of course that they should have the time of the Vicar and 'Vicaress' at their disposal, certainly for many hours, and all day long, if they wished. Mr. Blackburne afterwards asked why this was, and one of them said, 'Eh! we knowed what you were at, and so we did without.'

Such consideration was not quite found in the Prime Minister; not from want of heart, but from want of thought. The Duke, whose personal character was just then forgotten by 'the people' in their dislike of his politics, and more of events, which he had perhaps little to do with, was one with a contempt for trifles which made him sometimes overlook how great an influence they have over lesser minds.

The Duke was deeply distressed at the accident which had cast a shadow over all the opening ceremonies; but he was obliged to go on with the festivities, as the popular temper was so

sullen that it was feared that the disappointment of the crowd might lead to rioting, if it was balked of an expected sight. In some way or another the day was dragged through, the wretched weather harmonising with the clouded joy. As the Duke passed Eccles again he begged that messengers might be despatched to him to say how Mr. Huskisson was going on. He forgot that Mr. Blackburne had no obedient aides-de-camp to convey intelligence. But after all was over, Sir Benjamin Heywood sent his favourite horse, on which an 'old Peninsular man' rode, to inform the Mayor of Liverpool of Mr. Huskisson's death; who sent the veteran on to Childwall, where the Duke was staying with Lord Salisbury. The old soldier-premier asked who had brought the letter. On being told, he said, 'That's the man for me,' and sent him some miles further with another message. The horse, dead-tired, stumbled over some stones on coming back in the dark. The Eccles weavers, for long enough, told with supreme scorn (not of course deserved by the subject of it to any great extent) how 'Sergeant Lloyd, who had served the Duke, and he knew it, for he asked,—that he did, got never so much as a thankye, and Sir Benjamin's horse broke its knees and never were fit to rise again. That's your Duke!'

But, nevertheless, the 'revolutionists' were thoroughly satisfied with what they saw and heard of Lord Granville (Ambassador at Paris, but home for a few weeks); he was, the weavers said, 'a *real* gentleman.' Gossip quickly spreads when the whole energies of a small town are bent on discovering what passes within the walls of one house! His good looks and courteous manners were much commented on. But, what was better for those who had to do with him, he had a very kind heart, which made him the greatest comfort and help to Mrs. Blackburne during busy and trying hours. At one time he would attempt to comfort the poor widow, in which task only he and Mrs. Blackburne were in any degree successful; at another he would use all his diplomatic powers, to dismiss with courteous firmness intrusive visitors, or attend to needful business. Fate turned the peculiarly-shabby little Vicarage into a kind of diplomatic circle for three days. But everyone tried to inconvenience Mrs. Blackburne as little as possible, with all the chivalric deference which springs instinctively from the minds of well-bred persons, and rendered those anxious, busy days a time to look back to with some pleasure.

Naturally the accident, and the presence in the neighbourhood

of so many distinguished strangers, attracted the attention of the press; and one man in particular seems to have been before his time in attention to the art of interviewing. Hearing of the repulse of his brethren, he came, dressed in an old yeomanry uniform, as a messenger from 'the Duke,' who *must* see Mr. Huskisson personally, dying as he was. 'On peut être plus fin que les autres, mais pas plus fin que tous les autres.' Mrs. Blackburne was as quick to detect his trick as he to invent it, and in all her anxiety could not help feeling a little womanly triumph in her acuteness at such a moment. Naturally she would be more proud of herself for detecting a clever imposture than on account of the clear-headedness, helpfulness, and genuine sympathy which made her appear almost a heroine to all who had to do with her—for the accident of a day had brought into prominence the devoted work of years, of a kind then, but not now, uncommon. The story, as may be seen from references to it in several published journals of her contemporaries, was a favourite with many well-known men, who often asked her about it afterwards. She never seemed to think of her own readiness, or that, as might be said, she had been 'the right woman in the right place.'

The gratitude of Mrs. Huskisson was marked in many ways, kind words and deeds accompanying each other. Till Lord Wilton (a very old friend of Mrs. Blackburne) presented 'the Vicar to the Rectory of Prestwich, she sent each year 20*l.* to be distributed among the poor of Eccles, in memory of her husband's death in that place. Her thoughts of the kindness with which he had been received found expression in the gift of a large Bible, bound and decorated artistically in a way not common in those days, with the words in gilt letters on the flyleaf, 'I was a stranger and ye took Me in.'

This was the true story of Mr. Huskisson's death, now forgotten, but at the time so talked of that the narrative was altered into every conceivable shape, even to that (given in the 'Records of a Girlhood') which circumstantially told how he was carried to Liverpool. Someone observed soon after, that 'on the principle that German critics apply to Scripture narratives when they find discrepancies in events spoken of by different witnesses,' we should have 'a perfect right to conclude that there was no accident at all on September 15, 1830.'



## AN ATTRACTION.



A MAN was standing at one of the windows of the great dining saal of the New Bath Hotel at Rotterdam, listless and weary—weary of himself, perhaps, most of all. He had just arrived by the Harwich boat, after a smooth and lovely passage, which he had spent partly in company with a big meerschaum on deck and partly in cursing very audibly a wretched Frenchman, who was deplorably

sea-sick, and moreover had had the audacity to cast himself in his wretchedness not only into Liddell's berth, but actually on to Liddell's rug.

'Miserable little brute!' Liddell growled, with all the heartlessness of a splendid sailor. 'Come, get off the rug at least!' Then, finding that the Gaul did not understand one word of English, added, 'Ugh, you wretched little beggar! who would be a Frenchman, I wonder?'

That however was all over and done with, and he had reached his destination for that day. He had had a tub and a shave, and a change of clothing, yet his temper did not improve, or, to be quite correct, his weariness of heart did not pass away. To a casual observer he was just a big, fine, fair-haired, long-limbed man, belonging to the rich upper classes, yet a keener eye might see weary shadows under the eyes and a dissatisfied droop of the mouth under the trim brown moustache. It was not the face of a happy man.

He looked at the big, well-shaded room, with its array of big



looking-glasses, its long tables down the centre of the floor, and its little cosy ones beside the windows; he looked at the bill of fare from which he had just ordered his breakfast, at the flowers in the vases, and then at those blooming among the rockeries out in the bit of a quadrangle, which he supposed the hotel people were pleased to call a garden, and then he heard a girl's voice outside under the verandah say, 'Oh, Tom, we can't go out yet; I must write home to-day. I've never written a word since—since Thursday.'

He could not see Tom, but he heard a man laugh, a conscious sort of laugh, followed by the fizz of a fuzee and the odour of newly-lighted tobacco. The girl who had spoken sat at a little table facing the window, a pretty, fresh-coloured, silly-looking miss, evidently just out of the schoolroom, and as vain of the brand-new ring upon her left hand as if no one but herself had ever worn the badge of matrimony before.

'Married on Thursday,' said Liddell to himself, turning his eyes from the fresh-looking face of the girl (who, as yet, was not writing home, but, resting her elbows on the table, appeared to be contemplating her Tom with fond, adoring eyes) to the only persons besides himself in the room, a late couple, who were eating their breakfast in silence and with a timid air, as if they were not quite sure whether it was the right thing to have breakfast or not.

'What the devil did I come here for?' said Liddell irritably to himself, as he looked out of the window again.

'Your breakfast is served, sare,' said a smooth voice at his elbow.

He turned to the table with a dissatisfied sigh and seated himself. Well, after all, breakfast was a comfort. There were fresh strawberries, and a savoury omelette, which proved to be as good as it looked. Liddell helped himself again to it, and just then the sound of fresh voices made him turn his head towards the garden once more.

'More honeymooners,' he thought in disgust; 'the place is simply infested with them.'

But the pair out in the garden were neither fond and foolish nor abjectly timid, and Liddell was interested—deeply interested—in spite of the indisputable fact that a good omelette is better hot than cold.

'Fritz!' cried the husband.

'Pussy, pussy, pussy!' called the wife.

Now as every one knows who has been there to see, among the rockeries of that little made-the-most-of garden there is a fountain affair made by a single jet of water, which flows over half a dozen fragments of what has been once a sacred edifice in a tiny rivulet to a basin, which is neither of carven rock nor classic stone, but, may it please you, a good big bath sunk in the ground. Surrounded by moss-grown stones, fragments of arches and pillars interspersed with ferns and flowers, the whole affair does not look half bad, and on that particular morning such seemed to be the



opinion of a great grey cat, which, overpowered perhaps by the fierce heat of the July sun, and lulled by the ceaseless splash of the falling water, had composed itself to sleep on the very brim.

‘Hush—sh, Kitty!’ exclaimed the husband, his eyes following the direction his wife’s had taken. ‘Let the cat be. By Jove, what a chance!’

In a moment he had tipped Madam Puss fairly into the water, and Liddell laughed out aloud, as, with back arched and tail ruffled, she scrambled out swearing horribly and spitting anger and wrath at her enemy.

'Oh, for shame, Scott!' cried the girl. 'How you delight to teaze things!'

'Not bad, that, eh, Fritz?' said the husband to the waiter.

'Orrid beast, that cat, sare,' returned Fritz, grinning with delight. 'Eat up all my breakfast, she did, this morning—'orrid beast.'

'Oh, did she though? Then it was a proper retribution. Well, what are you going to give us for *our* breakfast?'

Fritz repeated glibly such dishes as happened to be going.

'Would you like fish, Kitty?'

'No, thanks; omelette.'

'I'll have one too. Omelette and coffee, then, Fritz.'

'Strawberries, sare?'

'No,' in decided tones from the girl called Kitty. 'What's the good of paying a guilder here for a few when we can get as many as we can eat in the town for fourpence?'

The husband laughed, and Fritz went off shrugging his shoulders. It was nothing to him whether they had fruit or not.

'That's a nice girl,' said Liddell to himself, 'and oh!——' with a long-drawn sigh, 'how she does remind me of——' He broke off short, not even ending his thought, and pushed away his now spoilt omelette, attacking the strawberries instead.

The frightened pair at the next table had betaken themselves timidly off, and Tom's wife was deep in her letter home, so Liddell rested his elbows on the table and fell to watching Kitty—he did not know who—now sauntering round the gravelled garden holding her husband's arm. A charming girl, he pronounced her, tall and straight as an arrow, with good grey eyes, and smooth, shining brown hair. He saw that the feet under the hem of her white serge gown were small and smart, and that her hands were slender but well-shaped and firm. And oh! how she did remind him of what he had been trying to find, or to forget, for more than three long and weary years!

As for the man, he was young, big, soldierlike, and clad in grey garments matching in lightness his wife's pretty serge frock. Truth to tell, Liddell was not particularly interested in him, apart from the fact of his being the husband of so charming a wife.

Presently they sauntered into the saal and seated themselves at the table the timid couple had vacated.

'Give me the paper, please Scott,' said she.

Now it happened that the 'Times' of the previous day was at

that moment under Liddell's elbow, and he presented it to her with a bow.

'Oh, thanks! but really I did not notice that you had it,' she said, looking at him with her clear grey eyes—dangerous eyes, they were.

'I was not reading it, indeed,' he assured her, which was true enough, for he had read every word of it the previous day.

'Well, I will look at it till you finish your breakfast and ours comes,' she said, smiling.

She sat with her back to the window, her face half turned to him, her left hand resting on the back of a vacant chair. Her husband on the other side of the table was very busy balancing a knife on his forefinger. After a few minutes of perfect silence, the little fresh-faced girl outside, forgetting that there were people in the saal, began reading her letter aloud:—

'MY DEAREST MOTHER,—We reached Rotterdam quite safely on Friday morning. I was very sick crossing, but felt all right when I had been on shore a few hours. We like Rotterdam very much, but mean to go on to-morrow, as Tom says we are wasting time here. I am very, very happy, and Tom——'

At this point Fritz came across the garden with a tray on his shoulder, and the voice sank to a murmur. Liddell, himself smiling broadly, saw that 'Scott' was showing all his very white and even teeth, while a dozen little imps of mischief had dimpled out upon the wife's face.

'Poor innocent!' she murmured. 'I wonder if I shall ever read my letters home to *you*? you'd be edified.'

The smile on his face deepened into a laugh. 'Oh, well, as to that, I looked over your shoulder yesterday and just saw one sentence—"Scott isn't very bright, though, to be sure, he is awfully good-tempered." That was a pretty thing to say of your husband.'

'Oh, that was about the luggage being lost,' she answered; 'all your fault.'

'Not a bit of it—all yours; for you made me laugh so at those French people, I never gave the boxes a thought.'

'Here is Fritz,' said the wife.

She handed the paper back to Liddell with a gracious smile, and he stayed to study news that he had already seen, simply that he might have the pleasure of watching the smooth coils of her brown hair, and listening to the musical tones of her soft voice.

‘Shall we go and see the monkey again, Scott?’ she asked.

‘If you like—let us have the strawberries first, though.’

‘Very good.’ A pause—then she spoke again: ‘I think we may as well go on to-morrow; we’ve seen everything here.’

‘Yes, we might have gone to-day, only you seemed to have set your mind on going to this *café chantant*.’

‘Yes, I must see that; I never was at one in my life.’

‘I expect it will be awfully low.’

‘Then we can come out. But Fritz says not—he says it is a splendid affair; that there is a young lady singer quite “an attraction.”’

‘Oh, Fritz—yes, I daresay’—contemptuously.

For a few moments there was silence in the large room; then the husband of the charming girl, who had taken Liddell’s not very easily pleased fancy, broke it.

‘I say, Baby,’ he said abruptly, ‘suppose we go up as far as Gouda this afternoon by rail, and look at the windows.’

Liddell threw down his paper and strode out into the garden, his heart in his mouth, and all his misery back upon him in tenfold force. The fresh-faced girl and her ‘Tom’ had disappeared, and Liddell flung himself down upon the nearest bench and wished fiercely that he were dead, or that he had never been born. Was it three years or three centuries ago that he had addressed just such a girl by that very term?

‘Oh! Baby, Baby, Baby,’ he groaned. ‘Where have you hidden yourself all this long, weary, sickening time? Shall I *never* find you again?’

A long time he sat there, till, indeed, the blistering heat of the sun sent him indoors for shelter, and when he reached the saal it was empty—Scott and Baby were gone.

In looking back upon that day, Liddell always thought of it as one of the longest and most dreary he had ever spent in his life. The heat was intense; and when Rotterdam is hot, it is hot—there is never any mistake about it; the clean white streets that morning were simply glaring, for the sunshine glanced off the white houses and the bright windows and beat upon the spotless pavement until they positively scorched the feet of passers-by. Liddell found his way up to the dusty Zoo, where an unfortunate Polar bear was panting his heart out, and tropical animals were laid about their dens in evident enjoyment. He saw, but was not much gratified by the sight—for he was not at that time in the

frame of mind to be pleased by trifles—the most wonderful thing in monkeys the civilized world contains—or, at least, so they said at the Rotterdam Zoo. I know not whether it be now living or dead, but a year or two back there was an ourang outang in those gardens, the oddest, quaintest little creature possible, sweet-tempered and lively, with soft fur of light stone-colour, and the wisest little dark face in the world, just like the face of a little old man. It was there then, the wonder and the pet of all; but Liddell, as I have said, was not much gratified by the sight of it. He left the gardens and sauntered back to the town, looked in at the Groote Kerk in disgust at the white-wash and the hat-pegs, dawdled along the Boompjes, and watched the different sorts of craft plying up and down or lying at anchor in the river; and then, finding that he had reached his hotel, he went in and called for brandy-and-soda in sheer desperation, and for want of anything else to do. From friendly Fritz he obtained all the information he wanted concerning the *café chantant*, and then he asked the name of the people who, like himself, intended to go there that evening.

‘Er—a lady in a white dress—tall—er—and the gentleman upset the cat into the water.’

Fritz grinned at the recollection of it. ‘Oh, yes, sare; Captain and Mrs. Laurie; the gentleman is *officier*—I don’t know what regiment.’

Presently he saw them arrive in a cab, and then they passed through the garden to the little side stairway leading to the upper floors. So they had come back! Fritz told him that they had bought a lot of old plates at Gouda, and seemed to think they had been completely done. Liddell felt as sorry as if he had been done himself.

The dinner was not so good as the breakfast had been, and before the long service had come to an end the Lauries slipped away, and Liddell immediately followed their example. He presently found himself in the *café*—a large low room, with many little marble-topped tables, and more unsteady iron chairs—on one side a stage, and on that stage a young person rejoicing in the name of Nellie d’Arlington, who, dressed in a short and scanty scarlet frock, held a golden skipping-rope in her hands, and sang, in a shrill and utterly unmusical voice, a music-hall song of which the refrain ran—

Ow, me lit-tal daarrling!



It was true that she could dance and skip, to perfection, yet Liddell looked to see what effect the performance had upon Mrs. Laurie. She laughed a little, but laughed yet more when a fat contralto in green satin, emerald green, garnished liberally with red roses, came forward and sang, with many wriggles and gesticulations, a French bravura song, winning a vociferous encore from the regular audience, which to a man shouted her name repeatedly the moment she ceased singing. But she in turn gave place to a weakly tenor, with a thick bare throat.

Then, pretty Jane, my dearest Jane,

Ah ! never look so shy—hy—hy,

But meet me, meet me in the ee—ee—eev'ning,

When the bloo—oo—oom is oo—oo—on the rye.

But nobody seemed to mind, and some people looked very much astonished when in the middle of the second verse the Lauries went out. Liddell would have followed them, but remembering there was nothing but bed for him if he went back to the hotel, stayed just for the next song, a ballad (Scotch), by a Miss Nelson—the attraction spoken of by Fritz the waiter.

The roar of applause which greeted the English ballad-singer caused Liddell to look back at the rough audience ; then the first notes of a ballad stole through the room, and for the second time that day Liddell felt a great knot creeping up his throat, a black mist gathered before him. He turned his dimmed eyes towards the stage, and saw, a vision ! A vision ? Oh no, a reality of flesh and blood ; the reality of great blue pleading eyes ; the reality of a mouth that he had kissed hundreds of times, but with the lips now down-drawn with misery, and, oh !—most painful reality of all to see—the face he had loved all his life bearing the cruel stamp of poverty and pain.

So much for the singer, and what of the song ? As the programme had promised, a ballad (Scotch) ; it was the song Liddell had been used to call his in the unforgetten days which would never come back to singer or listener any more ; a brave and spirited Border ballad, sung without bravery or spirit at all, yet with a passionate ring in the refrain which made her stolid hearers move their solemn heads to and fro and tap fat fingers against fat knees in pleasure and sympathy ; which told Liddell's fast-beating heart that, whatever had been the cause of their parting in the bygone days, she had not deserted him for lack of love.



Follow thee, follow thee, wha wadna follow thee ?  
 Lang hast thou lo'ed and trusted us fairly ;  
 Charlie, Charlie, wha wadna follow thee ?  
 King o' the Hieland hearts, Bonnie Prince Charlie !

When he had watched her off the stage, Liddell got up and staggered out into the soft night air. Behind him he heard the noisy applause, and loud calls for 'Home, sweet Home.' Would she come? Yes, the sweet voice stole out again, and the café was hushed to silence in a moment; he could have sworn that tears were standing in the dark-set blue eyes; he could hear them in every one of the dear familiar notes. He clenched his hands hard, and tried to recall the past with calmness.

Be it ever so humble,  
 There's no place like home.

Unmistakably was it the cry of a homeless woman. He could not understand it. More than three years before she had given him up, he who loved her more than all else that the wide world held. She had deliberately lost herself, so that until this very day he had never been able to find even a trace of her. And now that he had by mere chance, through the power of attraction of a strange woman, who had recalled her more vividly to his memory than anyone had ever done before—now that he had found her, he had found her—how? As a singer in a Dutch café chantant. Oh! it was hard, it was the most cruel blow that had ever fallen upon the man in all his thirty-and-two years of life.

He never hesitated, even while he stood under the summer night-sky battling with himself; he would wait; he would make her explain one way or the other. After this night uncertainty and doubt should be at an end, and he would be either in Paradise or in hopeless weariness which would last until his life's end. Yes, he would wait; and presently she came out, not through the café, but by a private door, and passed him by without a look. But Liddell strode after her and touched her shoulder. 'Baby,' he said. The girl started violently and stood staring at him. 'Charlie!' she exclaimed.

Liddell took hold of her hand very tenderly. 'Oh, Baby! how could you sing *my* song *there*?'

'Have you been *there*?' shivering.

'Yes! Shall I tell you frankly why? Because I saw at my hotel this morning a lady who reminded me of you. I went just for the pleasure of looking at her. And then I saw you and

heard, well ——' Trying to keep the triumphant ring out of his voice and succeeding very badly. 'Well, I heard as plainly as your voice could tell me that it was not because you did not love me that I got that cruel letter three years ago.'

'Oh, no—it was not *that*,' half turning away from him and looking through the night to the lights twinkling along the river.



'Then why was it? No, I will not let you go until you have told me,' as she tried to draw her hand from his.

'Then I will tell you,' she answered, 'and then you will be cured, thoroughly and effectually cured, of any love which may yet be lingering in your heart for me. You know that I lived all my life with Aunt Mary?'

'Yes, and when she died, you threw me over. Did you think I should care that she had no money to leave you?'

'Oh, no; I always told you Aunt Mary's income died with

her. It was that when she died she left a letter for me telling me the truth about my father, of whom I knew nothing, except that he died in Australia when I was very young.'

'Well?'

'Well!' she turned sharply round and fairly flashed out her next words. 'Well, my father was transported for forgery and died by his own hand before he had been in Australia a month—there!'

Liddell kept her hand more firmly than before. 'You might have given me the chance of showing you I loved you, in spite of your father's sins and shortcomings,' he said gently; 'but, tell me, is that all that you have put between us?'

'All! Is it not enough?' she asked. 'Besides there is that place,' pointing in the direction of the café.

'My Baby, could you not find something to do better than that?' he asked, ignoring her question.

'It is hard to want—bread,' she answered.

'I believe,' he asserted, 'it is harder to want—love. It is true I would rather you had had a father who behaved himself properly, and that you had not sung in a café chantant for your very bread, and yet,' putting his arm round her and drawing her to him, 'I have loved you all my life, and these are evils we can bury decently out of our sight for ever, if we try. I wish you had trusted me at the first, for, as a matter of fact, though I could hardly be such a cad as to throw the knowledge in your face, I have known all about your father ever since I was a lad; for it happened to be my father's name he took for his experiments. And now,' speaking very sternly and giving her a little shake; 'let me tell you I shall not give you the chance of "losing" yourself again, *Miss Nelson*.'

'I don't want to lose myself any more,' said Miss Nelson meekly.

